THE LEAGUE OF DISCONTENT

FRANCIS BEEDING

25

To Mrs. Clapp,

May the long hours
of your convalescence
soon shorten!

With all good wishes
for a speedy recovery.

"Chap" and "Boydie"

October 2, 1930.

THE LEAGUE OF DISCONTENT

By Francis Beeding

THE SEVEN SLEEPERS
THE LITTLE WHITE HAG
THE HIDDEN KINGDOM
THE HOUSE OF DR. EDWARDES
THE SIX PROUD WALKERS
PRETTY SINISTER
THE FIVE FLAMBOYS
THE LEAGUE OF DISCONTENT

THE LEAGUE OF DISCONTENT

By

FRANCIS BEEDING

TORONTO
McCLELLAND AND STEWART
1930

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THE LEAGUE OF DISCONTENT

CHAPTER I

I EXAMINE A THERMOMETER

I will begin with the Rolls. I shall have to confess to it sooner or later. The Rolls is a good car, and not all the chaff of my friends, which is seldom spared, can laugh me out of it. It may be ostentatious, but I am never late for lunch.

Diana was driving, and we were doing a smooth forty-five. I sat beside her marvelling at the wonders of science which enabled apparently so delicate a creature to control so much powerful machinery with a turn of the wrist or the pressure of a foot that is not noticeably larger than its kind. Not that Diana is nearly so delicate as she looks. Her handicap at golf is six, whereas mine — but that is a sore subject. Not many husbands would stand it.

We were driving south upon the dusty road that runs between the little hills of Provence from Avignon to Nîmes. For the last ten days we had been loitering among the vineyards of Burgundy, but that evening — October tenth to be exact — we intended to sleep at Nîmes, where we should meet our old friend Colonel Granby, who was taking a holiday in the south of France.

It was at the second curve on the road from Avignon, or maybe the third, that we picked up the nail. It was a noble fellow and the off front tyre sighed aloud

and gave up the ghost. Diana was luckily turning a corner at the time and pulled in quickly to the side.

Carstairs leaned over from the back seat and thrust his gaunt face between us.

I was forgetting Carstairs and I must warn you at once against his appearance. The lean and hungry look with which a pair of melancholy brown eyes survey the world from an elevation at least five inches above the average human level merely means that nature has been amusing herself at his expense. Of all the men I have ever met Carstairs is the saddest to look at and the happiest to know. He never smiles. His voice breathes the sepulchre. His vocabulary seems to be mostly derived from the reading of elegies, preferably in a country churchyard. But don't you believe it. He is more Falstaff than Cassius to the eye of truth.

Meanwhile his gaunt face is between me and Diana.

"There's matter in these sighs, these profound heaves," he said in his organ voice.

"It's a matter of a job of work, David," I answered. "You will find the jack in the tool box."

Carstairs extricated his long length from the back of the car.

"And I was just thinking of the *brandade* we ate at Hiely's," he said wistfully. "Was it, I wonder, merely a superior sort of kedgeree, or the food of the gods, as the Provençals maintain?"

"We thought you were admiring the scenery," said Diana.

"Very fine, very fine," he murmured, waving a lean arm at the olives and junipers and the low ridges of limestone crags upon the sky line.

He stooped and helped me to put the jack under the axle.

It was then that a familiar song came to our ears from round the bend in the road.

"My father is a Spanish captain;
When he sailed a year ago,
Ere he left me, turned and kissed me,
Bade me always answer 'No'."

The strong baritone swelled as I breasted the hill to identify the singer. Granby should rightly have been waiting for us at Nîmes, but that was Granby's voice. I would have known it anywhere. And there was Granby himself, spare and stark against the evening sunlight, with the thin face and piercing blue eyes.

"No, John, no, John, no, John, no," he sang out and then broke off abruptly as he caught sight of us.

"Geoffrey," he said, "complete with Rolls. Here's a bit of luck."

He put a friendly hand on my shoulder and held out the other to Diana.

"Hullo, Toby," she said. "Where did you spring from?"

Diana felt with justice that Granby's baptismal name of Alistair was impossible and had decided to call him Toby, on the ground that, usually when she met him, he had his nose in a jug.

Granby jerked his head towards the top of the hill over which he had come.

"I am the victim of a hired car," he answered. "There is something seriously wrong inside. Most of

the essential parts were either left behind at the garage or have since been strewn upon the way."

"I feel a bit like that myself," said Carstairs, looking up from the spare wheel he was trundling towards us.

"This is David," said Diana introducing him. "He thinks of nothing but food."

"I sometimes think of food myself," said Granby.

"Women hate food," said Carstairs, shaking his lean head.

"Jealousy," Granby explained. "It's annoying to be cut out by an oyster patty."

"Thank you," said Diana. "I see now where you place us, somewhere between the soup and the savoury."

Granby stooped to lend a hand with the spare wheel.

"Which way are you supposed to be going?" I asked. "Were you coming to meet us, or what?"

"I was being driven to the Pont du Gard," he answered. "I'll tell you about it later."

"But you ought to be at Nîmes," insisted Diana.

"I certainly didn't expect to see you rising up over this particular hill," I put in.

"Geoffrey was expecting to see Don Quixote come riding round the corner," said Diana. "He said so only a moment before we picked up the nail."

"Bit of an anticlimax, what?" said Granby.

Provence always suggests to me a forlorn chivalry vanishing round the bend of the road, but it was Granby instead, and though the sudden appearance of my old friend ruefully deploring the inadequacy of a hired car may seem a decline from romantic fancy to dull fact, I can assure you that he was shortly to lead us

all, not for the first time, into adventures as strange as any that befell the Spanish knight.

But I am going too fast.

"There is a good hotel at the Pont du Gard," Diana reminded us. "Why not stay there this evening?"

"I once had a brace of quails there that weren't bad," said Carstairs, straightening his long back and brushing the dust from his hands. "There was also a *vin rosé* which was not impossible."

"I feel that Colonel Granby will join us now," said Diana.

"How well you know me," murmured Granby. "I will get my luggage, that is if the Rolls does not object. But I must warn you that I am travelling light. You will look in vain for the gold-leaf pyjamas and the dressing case with platinum fittings."

He strolled off as he spoke, and we finished putting on the spare wheel.

A moment later he returned, bearing a suitcase which looked as though it had been knocking about in the rough regions of the world for the last ten years, and we were soon ready to start again. Diana took the wheel, with Carstairs beside her. Granby sat with me in the back of the car.

"Granby," I said anxiously, "is anything the matter? I mean, why should you be here instead of there?"

"There's nothing the matter as far as I know," answered Granby cautiously. "I came down here for a holiday. But you know how it is. We have always to keep in touch with Headquarters. They swore they would leave me alone this time, for I really did need a spot of leave."

I looked at him as he spoke and saw that the thin face was more lined than usual.

"I am what they call 'recuperating in the sunny south.' All the same, I have just had a wire from London. The usual sort of thing. I just happen, as they say, to be in these parts and there just happens, as they say, to be a job of work in the district. The man, by the way, is a miller," he added inconsequently.

"Haven't you missed out something?" I asked.

"About the miller, you mean? His name is Seguin, Robert Seguin, and he was once in the Service. He is now the miller of the Pont du Gard — very much retired. I'm to trip over and see him. He's been writing to the Office, confound him. It may, they think, be a mare's-nest, but Robert in his day was a lively fellow and his communications were usually good value. So I am going to hear what he has to say."

"You mean," I said, as we flashed past a great cypress hedge swaying in a gentle *mistral* which promised to blow harder in the morning, "that he has got some information which he wants to sell to the British Government."

"So he says, and unless he has changed his methods of business, we shall have to pay him every penny of what it may be worth."

"If I may be sufficiently indiscreet," I began.

"You are," said Granby.

"What is he going to tell you about? Mad Mullahs in Mesopotamia, Bolsheviks in Bermondsey, Coiners in Cairo, Treason in the Treasury?"

"I haven't a notion. Robert is like that. He will talk on occasion — at about a shilling a word. His taci-

turnity was once professional, but is now a disease. He retired from the Service about two years ago; inherited the mill from his father, and it apparently suffices his simple needs. Anyhow the Service hears no more of him, except that now and then one of us on leave looks up the old boy and takes a glass of wine at the mill. And now here he is cropping up again, just as I thought we'd be off to Monte. He has wired to the Office saying would we send somebody to see him. It's the old formula. He always did keep us guessing till we sent him a special messenger. He got more money that way — at least he thought he did. Seguin comes of a line of peasants, money in the stocking — all that sort of thing.

"By George," he broke off suddenly, "there's something that's hard to beat."

He was looking to the left as he spoke, for during our conversation we had run through Remoulins and were now very close to our destination. Over the level fields, crossed by the Gardon, which we could not see, rose in arched majesty the golden line of the Roman aqueduct. In the evening light, it hung suspended between two green cliffs, more like the work of giants than of men. I caught my breath as we swept round towards it, though I had often seen it before. Superbly it spanned the limpid river at its feet, where the trout were rising with little musical plops that left widening circles on the ruffled water. Gaunt and yellow with age, as though carved in ivory, it reached from cliff to cliff.

"I feel that we could bisect a trout to some purpose," said Carstairs, as we ran slowly over the bridge that runs beside the aqueduct.

He looked up at the great arches and his eyes were filled with speculation.

"One up to the Romans," I said. "Even Carstairs is impressed."

"To think," he muttered, "that they could build a thing like that. And for what purpose? To carry water. Now if it had been wine . . ."

"You are the sort that would rob a church," remarked Diana. "Have you no eyes?"

"Certainly Romans knew how to build," Carstairs admitted.

He broke off as the car swung left-handed and ran smoothly down the road, leaving the great aqueduct, like fretted bronze, behind us. We drew up opposite the door of the pleasant inn beside a neolithic cave.

The wife of the innkeeper appeared expectantly at the entrance of the large room, if I may describe it as such, in which it is usual, in most weathers, for the guests to take their meals. It is an enclosure fifty or sixty feet each way, furnished with green tables and wicker chairs. It has no walls but only a floor of beaten earth and a tiled roof supported on wooden pillars and beams.

Carstairs and Granby unstrapped the baggage and I ran the car into the garage, assisted by the innkeeper himself, a stout little man with a black moustache. He was not inclined to be expansive, but responded readily to treatment when I praised the two fine orange trees which grew, one on either side of the garage, in wooden tubs.

I left the garage and walked to the inn, passing on

my way a man, a rather obvious Englishman, wearing grey tweeds and a hard collar. I should not have noticed him except that he seemed particularly to notice me. I became aware of two grey eyes, looking me up and down, very shrewd and hard eyes that seemed on principle determined not to miss anything of consequence. The face was strong and intelligent, with a firm jaw and the mouth of an orator. The man smiled and nodded as I passed, with the practised affability of one who makes a point of being civil to the world at large. I knew that smile. My father sits on one or two boards in the City and I have seen it on the faces of his friends and colleagues. It is the smile of the man who stands you lunch in the hope of doing a better deal over the coffee and cigars.

I nodded and passed on my way, but suddenly I heard his voice behind me.

"By Jove, sir, is that your car?"

I faced about and confessed.

"Fine piece of workmanship," he continued, gazing with an approving eye at the gleaming bonnet of the Rolls. "Needs courage to buy a Rolls nowadays; too much like wearing diamond studs in the shirt."

I grinned sheepishly.

"I try to live it down," I answered.

We stood awkwardly a second or two after my remark. Then, with a vague wave of the hand, he turned, and moving quickly away, slipped round a corner of the garage to the left and was lost to sight.

Now that he had gone I felt that his face was vaguely familiar — the broad, rather fine forehead, the shrewd eyes, the loose lips and the strong jaw beginning to

sag a little under the chin. But I had certainly never met him.

Presently I found myself in an airy bedroom on the first floor, where I helped Diana to unpack the suitcases. There were two beds of massive oak, stained surprisingly to the colour of a shiny orange. The beds and the enormous wardrobe beside them suggested Viollet-le-Duc dreaming a reconstruction of the Middle Ages.

"I now know what they mean by carpenters' Gothic," said Diana, as she laid a pair of rose-silk pyjamas over the end of one of the beds.

I was ready before she was and went downstairs in search of an *apéritif*. I found Granby alone in the dining room with the earthen floor. He seemed preoccupied and of Carstairs there was no sign.

I sipped my vermouth in silence.

"There doesn't seem to be many other people staying here," I said at last.

"Eh?" said Granby absently. "No, we seem to be the only party."

"The man in the grey suit isn't one of us by any chance?" I enquired.

Granby darted a keen look at me.

"Well," he said, "what of him?"

"Nothing," I answered, "but he was tactless enough to admire the Rolls."

Granby nodded.

"He probably had one himself in his better days," he said drily. "You recognized him, of course."

"No, I didn't. To the best of my belief I've never set eyes on him before," I answered.

"He is registered in the hotel under the name of Richards," said Granby.

"Who is he anyway?" I asked. "And why did you look him up in the register?"

"It's my job to be interested in criminals," said Granby.

"Criminals?"

"Criminals," repeated Granby. "That, young fellow-my-lad is, or perhaps I should say was, the famous Julius Schlotterbeck."

I cudgelled my wits. The name, like the face, aroused a vague memory, but I could not definitely place it.

"You evidently have never moved in the realms of high finance," Granby observed. "Julius was quite a figure in his day. He had a splendid run for his money — and most of it wasn't his money at all; but they got him at last on a charge of fraud. The business was so complicated that only he and the prosecuting counsel really understood what it was all about, but he got five years of the best from old Mr. Justice Thomlinson."

"You are very well-informed," I said.

He nodded.

"Aunt Letitia," he replied, "was one of his victims."

The idea that Granby has an aunt Letitia always tickles me. I laughed.

"Yes, my boy," he went on. "But it was no laughing matter, I can assure you. Every penny of the poor old dear's went into one of his schemes and she took it rather badly. Not a pleasant sort of fellow, Schlotterbeck. I expect, by the way, that he remembers me. In the character of a dutiful nephew and prospective heir, I gave evidence for Aunt Letitia at the trial."

"Did he recognize you this evening, do you think?"

"He pretty certainly did. There isn't much that escapes his eagle eye and he isn't likely to forget any one who was connected with the trial.

"But here," he added suddenly, "is your friend Carstairs — in search of a drink, I suppose."

David appeared at the doorway, and a moment later Diana.

We dined in the inner dining room, which like the bedrooms was full of Gothic furniture. It was what Carstairs called a simple dinner, the two main dishes being fresh trout from the Gardon and a *poulet Gardien* swimming in cream and onions. For this he had to be consoled by the personal assurance of the innkeeper that he should have a partridge for lunch next day.

We were a merry party at dinner. Granby can be the best of company when he pleases. He won the enduring respect of Carstairs by airily displaying a knowledge of gastronomy such as few can claim, and then, the talk passing to the great aqueduct, he intrigued us with minute descriptions of the monuments he had seen as a rover in three continents. He had an extraordinary visual memory and the gift to describe vividly the things he had seen. The time passed quickly and it must have been nearly ten o'clock when we rose from the table.

I suggested bridge after dinner, but Diana was tired. So she and Carstairs played a hand or two of piquet before going to bed, while Granby and I strolled out to look at the great bridge by moonlight. I will not trouble you with our impressions. You can go and see it any day for yourselves. I will only say that we re-

turned to the inn feeling not quite such fine twentieth-century fellows as we normally assume ourselves to be. It needed the Rolls, gleaming beside the neolithic cave, to restore my self-respect. The Romans could build a bridge but they had never moved faster than a horse.

Granby's curiosity, when we returned, was aroused by the thermometer which hung on one of the wooden pillars supporting the roof of the dining room outside. We examined it together. The information which it imparted was startling. Beginning with the temperature at Senegal (which, next to hell, is apparently the hottest place in the universe), we moved rapidly through mere tropical heat to the heat of a beehive, the heat of a human body, the temperature of a sick chamber, and then, surprisingly to the point at which ink freezes and wine should be iced, concluding with the temperature of Paris in 1861.

I was beginning to feel sleepy, and, turning with a yawn, I moved towards the open door of the hotel.

"What about a whisky and soda?" I said over my shoulder.

Granby was still standing by the thermometer, and he bent down, as I spoke, to examine the inscription written at the foot of it. At the same instant, a low twang, just audible in the still air, came to my ears, followed by a light tap, as though the point of a stick were striking a tree.

I looked towards Gransby. To my astonishment there was a little bunch of feathers above his right shoulder.

He straightened himself abruptly, took the bunch of feathers between his fingers, and without a word,

in a couple of swift strides, moved over the earthen floor to the door of the hotel.

We entered the hall together, and I saw that he was carrying in his hand a short wooden arrow, brightly feathered at one end.

He picked up a newspaper lying on the table and wrapped the arrow in a sheet of it. Then he turned to me.

"A whisky and soda by all means," he said. "But I think we'll take it indoors."

CHAPTER II

I MISS THE DYING AND FIND THE DEAD

I was early astir next morning and shaved by the open window. Diana was still sleeping. She has indeed a capacity for sleep which I have always envied.

The trees and thick scrub on the hillside were alive under the early sun, and there below me was Granby, apparently absorbed in the operations of an enterprising blue tit, who with the wicked intelligence of his kind had perched himself on the alighting board of a hive of bees and was gently tapping the side of it with his bill. Now and then a bee would walk out to see what was happening and would be promptly swallowed for his pains.

Granby looked up and saw me at the window.

"Morning, Geoffrey," he said. "I've something to show you when you're ready."

I hastened down as quickly as I could and found him pacing the earthen-floored dining room, the remains of his breakfast on a green table to the left. He held a letter in his hand.

"News," he said, as I advanced. "You remember Caramac?"

I looked at him in astonishment. Did I remember Caramac? Why, even at the mention of his name I had that sinking feeling which you read about on the labels of patent medicine bottles. I remembered Cara-

mac, and so perhaps do you. It was in all the newspapers not so very long ago, for the Italians do not shut up a man in the Islands of the *Confinati* without good and sufficient reason, and the reasons in this case had been more than adequate. But for Granby, Caramac two years ago would have assassinated the Prime Minister of Italy. Incidentally, he had made me acquainted with death and given me a very real glimpse of the devil.

"Yes," I answered feebly. "I remember Caramac."

"This," Granby continued, "is a letter from Oldsby. It's full of the usual F.O. gossip, including a little bit about our friend. But you'll never guess."

"Don't say that he's escaped?"

"No. Nor has he disappeared leaving a smell of sulphur and a pentacle on the floor. He has been let out."

"What?" I exclaimed.

"General amnesty," said Granby shortly. "The Italian Government needed a beautiful gesture. Prerogative of mercy, red-letter day. The Vatican and the Quirinal have made their peace and behold the Seven Hills skipping like rams."

"But Caramac," I protested.

"Such beautiful weather, too," murmured Granby. "But this is what Oldsby says: 'You remember that general amnesty proclaimed by the Italian Government a couple of months ago. Do you realize that it included your old friend, Jean Caramac? They hesitated to let him out, but they wanted the amnesty to be complete and in his case there was another reason. I hear from Pinucci that he is a dying man.'"

Granby folded up the letter as he finished and put it into a side pocket. I said nothing but gazed through the rustic trellis towards the black mouth of the prehistoric cave, whose contents are to be seen in the museum at Nîmes if you have the time to go and look at them.

A dying man. That was all very well. But Caramac had been a dying man when I met him first. In spite of that he had nearly destroyed us. I had a sudden memory of him in his wheel chair — a physical wreck in whom only the brain remained alive.

"When did this happen?" I enquired at last.

"About two months ago," answered Granby.

"Perhaps he's dead by now," I said hopefully.

"Perhaps," responded Granby. "Anyhow, it's nothing to worry about. The devil is loose, but his claws are cut and I expect the Italian Government will keep him well in sight. Cheer up, old boy. You look as if you had seen a ghost."

I shivered. For that was exactly how I felt.

"I don't think I shall tell Diana," I said. "She is funny about Caramac and it might spoil her holiday, like walking under a ladder or spilling the salt."

At that moment our hostess entered with coffee and fresh rolls. I sat at the table while Granby smoked his pipe by the trellis. Soon I remembered that he had a more immediate matter on his mind.

"Granby," I said, "I've been thinking."

Granby looked incredulous and I hastened to explain.

"That business of the arrow," I began.

Granby smiled.

"I've settled that," he said. "Landlord's small boy . . . shooting owls in the garden, nearly hit me instead. I dealt with him firmly this morning and he may have to take his breakfast off the mantelpiece."

I looked at Granby doubtfully.

"Are you quite sure?" I asked.

"Quite," said Granby. "I was a prefect at school and my hand has not lost its cunning."

"Don't jibber," I said crossly. "You know very well what I mean. Are you sure it was the boy who shot the arrow?"

"He was shooting owls in the garden," repeated Granby stubbornly.

"At ten o'clock?" I asked.

"He was a bit vague about the hour," said Granby.

"Then how do you know it was the boy?"

"Who else should it be?"

"You know that better than I do. You've confessed that you are on a mission and you always stand to be shot at."

"You mean that somebody was trying to murder me?"

"It has happened before."

"With a little wooden arrow."

"It may have been poisoned."

"Geoffrey," he said, "you are a bit morbid this morning, aren't you?"

"You wrapped it up pretty carefully," I pointed out.

The thin mouth shut like a mousetrap. It is wise to change the subject when Granby assumes that expression, but I was still unsatisfied.

"I think you ought to go into the matter," I said.

"You'll be taken for an owl yourself if you look like that," said Granby. "What do you want me to do? Produce the arrow in court or what?"

He looked at me quizzically and put a hand on my shoulder.

"Sorry if you've had a bad night," he said. "Wash it out, Geoffrey. Meanwhile, there's that job of work I mentioned. You'll have to excuse me this morning."

"The merry miller of the Pont du Gard?"

"The same," said Granby. "A queer fish is the miller and seldom merry. He is the sort of man your friend Carstairs would be if Carstairs lived up to his appearance. Nice fellow, Carstairs. And so terribly unexpected. You think he is going to sing a psalm and he blames the cutlets instead."

"If you haven't yet had any breakfast," came a voice from the door.

We turned. There was Carstairs with Diana beside him.

"Morning, David," I said. "Did I hear you mention breakfast?"

"Don't," said David. "They call it coffee and it was black. Otherwise . . ."

"Stop him, please," broke in Diana. "He may go on like this for hours."

"I'm afraid I sha'n't be of much use to you this morning, Diana," said Granby.

"He's got a job of work," I explained.

"Really," protested Diana. "Don't they ever leave you in peace?"

"We will meet for lunch," said Granby hopefully.

"Meanwhile," I suggested, "there's the Pont du Gard. You've hardly seen it yet."

"I'm told one can walk across it," said Diana.

I nodded.

"Yes," I said. "I think I know the way."

Diana and David moved into the yard. I looked hesitatingly at Granby.

"Sure you wouldn't like me to come along with you?" I asked.

He put his hand on my shoulder.

"My fidus Achates," he said. "Still worrying? No thanks, Geoffrey. You are on a holiday and I hope to be having one myself this afternoon. Besides I'm not starting at once. Letters to write. It's your job to amuse Diana and protect her from any further reference to the powdered acorns."

He turned as he spoke and moved towards the door of the hotel.

I came up with Diana and Carstairs and, a few minutes later, we began to walk up the sloping path which, starting from the hotel yard, runs deviously through undergrowth, up the steep side of a hill, towards the eastern end of the aqueduct. We walked on for some moments, talking about nothing in particular. The *mistral* was blowing, but it was not unpleasantly strong and on the sheltered hillside the scent of crushed herbs rose deliciously from under our feet as we tramped up through the *maquis* on that gorgeous October morning. The path was sunk slightly below the level of the hillside and was almost entirely overgrown by the wild ilex and olive which spread thick on either side. So thick indeed was the undergrowth

that in parts it actually met overhead, and Carstairs had to bend nearly double to avoid the arching boughs.

"The innkeeper, with whom I had a few words this morning," said Carstairs, breaking a short silence, "told me that this path leads to a château. I was telling him that the milk with which I vainly tried to make the coffee slightly more palatable came from a tin. He confessed that I had reason. The fresh milk goes to the château. I don't know what they do with it all. The proprietor probably takes a hot milk bath every morning."

"There may be a château," I said cautiously. "But I've never followed this path beyond the aqueduct. In fact I have never climbed it before. I have always crossed the aqueduct from the other end and then walked down this path to the hotel."

"Funny place for a château," said Diana, pausing to smell the rosemary which grew tall about the path.

"Tell us about it, Geoffrey," she went on. "You're the only one who knows."

"These hills are very desolate," I observed, beginning to have an uneasy feeling that I had lost my way. "They stretch some miles along the Gardon, until you get to the main road from Uzès to Nîmes over there," and I pointed straight ahead.

"What sort of a château did he say, David?" I continued.

"Perhaps it's a baby farm," suggested Diana hopefully. "That would account for the milk."

"Genus and architecture unspecified," replied Carstairs. "But it was a château and it is inhabited by Mr. the Count, as is the case with most châteaux. Mr.

the Count is apparently very rich and of a morose habit, for, as far as I could gather, this is the only path that leads to his abode."

"Well, it's not exactly a motor track," said Diana.

"Mr. the Count," said Carstairs, "has, perhaps, no use for cars. Nasty, modern things. I see him in a rich library, surrounded with first editions and translating five lines of Lucretius a day. The next day he improves his work by inserting a comma and the day after he takes it out again, while punctually at eleven o'clock a footman enters with a glass of warm milk on a tray."

We walked on steadily for some ten minutes or so.

"This aqueduct of yours," said Carstairs presently, "must be about a mile high. We have been walking steadily uphill for the last fifteen minutes."

"Haven't you missed the turning, Geoffrey?" said Diana.

I blushed. The moment had come to confess. I had lost my way. It often happens, and Diana on these occasions is either sarcastic or kind. I don't know which is the more annoying. I stopped and looked about me in the manner of an intelligent Boy Scout momentarily at fault. The undergrowth was thinner here and the pleasant sun shone on the grey leaves of wild olive, mingling with the darker green of the ilex.

"Geoffrey has missed the turning," said Diana to Carstairs. "I know that look."

"Well," said Carstairs, "what do we do now?"

"Sorry," I muttered. "But this scrub is a bit confusing. I think perhaps I'd better strike off to the right. I may be able to see the bridge from the crest."

"Left," said Diana.

"Why do you say that?" I protested.

"Only because you said right," said Diana cheerfully. "He's always wrong, you know," she added to Carstairs by way of explanation.

"Just as you like," said Carstairs. "Right or left, so long as I just sit here and wait. If you happen to get lost . . ."

"He *is* lost," Diana pointed out.

"Then if you happen to get found, make a noise like a sea mew and we will come to your assistance."

Carstairs stretched his length upon a sun-warmed slab of limestone and Diana sat down beside him.

"Babes in the wood," he murmured.

I turned and pushed my way through the bushes. It was harder going than I had imagined and it must have been ten minutes before I had reached a point on the hillside from which I could look over the crest. I then saw that I had overshot the concealed turning to the aqueduct by nearly half a mile. The mighty bridge was well away to my right, only just visible, most of it being cut off by a projecting shoulder of the hill.

I stood for a while in dudgeon. We should have to retrace our steps, and I was by no means certain in any case of finding the way. We certainly could not force a path through the thick undergrowth. At least it would be quite out of the question for Diana to do so, for she was wearing a thin silk frock and her comments . . . But I would not think about her comments.

I made my way back to the path again, and,

turning to the left, walked down it to meet the jury.

"You are right, David," I said. "We have overshot the mark by half a mile. We must go back to where we saw that pile of loose stones, which is I think part of the remains of the aqueduct. We can turn off there and find our way through."

I waited for Diana. I was prepared to bow the head within reason. But Diana said nothing, which so surprised me that I looked at her enquiringly. It was then that I saw that she was rather pale.

"Hullo," I said, "anything the matter?"

"Diana's a bit upset," said Carstairs. "And I don't blame her, for we've just seen the queerest outfit — including the biggest and ugliest aborigine that I've ever met. We were just sitting here, being babes in the wood, when he turned up."

"The wicked uncle," said Diana with a queer little laugh. "Geoffrey," she added, "I will give you ten thousand guesses and you will never tell me who it was that we saw just now."

I looked at her in silence a moment.

"Well," I prompted.

"It was all rather extraordinary," said Carstairs. "We heard somebody coming up the path. We turned round and there, advancing through the green shade of the alley, was a large nigger in white ducks. Gave me quite a turn as the charladies say. He took no notice of us and we drew discreetly to one side. I helped Diana up the bank, in fact. The nigger was followed at a short distance by the stretcher party."

I raised my eyebrows at that.

"Two more niggers," continued Carstairs, "bearing

a sumptuous litter or palanquin between them — sort of eighteenth-century affair — in green lacquer. The silk curtains were drawn back and there was a thin face, such a wicked face it was, peering at us through the window."

"The eccentric millionaire," I suggested, after a pause.

"Eccentric," said Diana, "and perhaps a millionaire, but also somebody we know."

She paused.

"I give it up," I said.

"Geoffrey," she said in a low voice, "it was Jean Caramac."

I looked at her in utter bewilderment.

"Caramac," I stammered.

"Diana was just reminding me," said Carstairs. "It seems he's the chap who was shut up some time ago after trying to assassinate the Italian Prime Minister. But his assassinating days are over, old boy, and, if half of what Diana says about him is true, the stokers are getting busy down below. He looks about as ill as a man can be."

"He is certainly changed," said Diana. "He is much older and his face is the colour of wax. But there was no mistaking him."

"Did he see you?" I asked mechanically.

"No," said David. "The only one who saw us was the nigger in front. They were going rather fast, you know, looking neither to the right nor left."

"Geoffrey, what does this mean?" said Diana, and her grasp tightened on my arm. "What is he doing here? Has he . . . escaped?"

"No," I said. "I ought to have told you, perhaps. I certainly never expected to find him here, but this morning Granby received a letter, telling him among other things that Caramac had been let out."

"Impossible," said Diana.

"Well," said Carstairs, "there's hope for us all in that case, and when I am put in quod for carving up my young brother, who is a troublesome fellow, I shall expect to be released with a pension."

"Caramac," I explained, "has been released under a general amnesty. The Italian Government is celebrating the new concordat with the Pope. But what on earth is he doing here?"

We stood silent a moment. My own thoughts were busy with the past, which had suddenly come very near. Then, abruptly, Diana gave a cry of pain, and I found that I was gripping her so firmly by the hand that her rings were being crushed into her fingers.

"There was another reason why they let him out," I said. "They say that he has only a few months to live."

A bee came blundering into the green tunnel where we stood.

"Negroes," I said stupidly.

"Huge fellows," said Carstairs, "and very black."

Diana was nervously crushing a sprig of rosemary in her hand.

"Come along, Geoffrey," she said suddenly. "Let's talk of something else."

I turned and led the way down the path. We came in a few minutes to the pile of stones which proved on inspection to be, as I had imagined, part of the remains

of the aqueduct. Here we found our bearings and, pushing through some low scrub, we shortly hit a little path which ended soon in the open mouth of a tunnel.

"Diana," I said, as I came up with her in the scrub, "you're not to worry about Caramac. We finished with him long ago and he is a broken man."

"I'm not worrying," said Diana, and meant exactly the opposite, as I knew.

"We shall be going on to Nîmes to-night," I said.

"I'm sorry, Geoffrey, to be so feeble, but I can't help it. He is the one person in the world who has ever made me know what it is to be really afraid. I suppose that is why I hate him so much. It's perfectly beastly seeing him again — like a cloud passing over the sun, if you know what I mean."

"So the water flowed through here, did it?" said Carstairs, pointing to a tunnel at the mouth of which we had now arrived.

"Apparently not," I answered. "What happened to the water is wrapt in mystery. They made the tunnel under Napoleon III, but no trace of a Roman channel was found. The latest theory is that the water was taken through in leaden pipes."

I led the way along the tunnel towards the aqueduct in the best guidebook manner.

"The channel of the water in the aqueduct," I continued, "is nearly seven feet deep and it was roofed with stone slabs to prevent evaporation."

"How much do we give this fellow?" said Carstairs in a hoarse whisper to Diana.

We presently found ourselves walking in single file down the water way, one hundred and fifty feet

above the Gardon. There was plenty of light, for every now and then one of the slabs roofing the channel was broken or displaced; and, when we got to about the middle of the aqueduct, we hoisted ourselves up, so that we could sit on the flat roof, with legs dangling in the passage where the water had run and with head and shoulders in the open air. It was, as I have said, a gorgeous day, and the *mistral* kept it considerably cooler than would have ordinarily been the case at that time of year. To our right, far away, was the pointed spire of the little church of St. Hilaire, and to the left, the brilliantly green river ran between its bluff cliffs covered with shrubs.

At our feet, almost, was the mill whither Granby had taken himself. The sudden sight of it reminded me again of Caramac. Granby would be interested to know of his presence in these parts.

"Look here, you two," I said, "we might, if you are feeling energetic, stroll down to meet Granby at the mill."

"I'm not feeling in the least energetic," said Carstairs.

"It will give you an appetite," I pointed out.

"I'm sufficiently hungry as it is," retorted Carstairs.

"Very well," I said, "you stay up here with Diana and I'll walk down to the mill."

"One moment," said Carstairs, "what are we going to do this afternoon?"

"A little exercise, perhaps. I'm rather tired of sitting in the car."

"I hate exercise," said Carstairs.

"Then why don't you two take the car into Nîmes and see the sights? I will go for a walk with Granby — unless he has something better to propose."

"After lunch, I hope," said David. "You haven't forgotten the partridge?"

"We haven't forgotten the partridge," Diana hastened to assure him.

And so it was settled.

I passed along the bridge to the further end, where a circular stone staircase led me down to the bare rock of the hillside. Thence, by a little path, I slipped to the road beneath. My thoughts were busy as I went. Caramac was not only a free man, but apparently our neighbour. And last night there had been that incident of the arrow. Was there a connection? I felt, anyhow, that Granby could not be too promptly warned. I went quickly down the road towards the mill.

It took me about five minutes to reach it, a square yellow building with a round tower projecting over the Gardon. At the foot of the tower was the mill wheel. No one seemed to be astir and I perceived that the shutters were closed.

I knocked on the door. For some little while nothing happened and I knocked again. There was a shuffling of slippered feet within the house and abruptly the door was opened by a red-eyed woman with grey hair. For a moment I hesitated. The woman had obviously been weeping.

"*Monsieur désire?*" she enquired.

I asked for the English gentleman who had called that morning. Was he still in the house?

The woman turned without a word, but gave a sign

that I should follow her. Rather diffidently I went after her, moving down a narrow passage towards a closed door at the far end. She put her hand to the latch and threw it open.

"The body is in there," she said.

CHAPTER III

I DRAW A BLANK

I moved aghast through the door into the room. It was dark, for the shutters were closed. The only light came from four tall candles, which stood each at the corner of a bed, and on the bed lay the body of a man. His hands were folded across his breast. He was clasping a small black crucifix and his eyes were weighted. There was a profusion of box and the air was aromatic.

I gave a great sigh of thankfulness. The man was a stranger.

"He died this morning," came Granby's voice in my ear.

It was then that I saw him. He was standing on the further side of the bed, in a corner by the wall.

I looked once more at the dead face.

"The miller?" I asked.

Granby nodded.

"How did this happen?"

"That," said Granby, "remains to be seen. The end was rather sudden, but he had been ill for some days apparently. There appears to be nothing abnormal."

He touched me on the arm and we turned to leave the room. The woman, as we did so, dipped a branch of box into a little pot of holy water standing on a table at the foot of the bed, and with it sprinkled with

a mechanical gesture the body of her dead husband. Then she followed us from the room.

We passed down the corridor into the open air and found ourselves in sort of compound, enclosed by the back of the house, a shed containing the mill wheel and a barn. The fourth side was open to the river.

"Now, Madame Seguin," said Granby moving towards the table and chairs standing in the sunlight, "tell us, please, what happened."

Madame Seguin nodded.

"*Oui, Monsieur,*" she said.

She shuffled past us into the house and reappeared almost at once, bearing a bottle of wine and glasses.

"It was his own wine, Messieurs," she said. "He will not drink it again."

She wiped her eyes mechanically. Her tears were for the dead, but her attentions were for the living. The death of her husband had evidently come as a shock to her, but she accepted it with the philosophy of the French peasant. Silently she filled the three glasses and, rising, we turned by a common impulse, and, following her example, bowed slightly in the direction of the room from which we had just been ushered.

"He was a good husband," said Madame Seguin. "But he was a bad father," she added inconsequently.

She had, I noted, a vague, forlorn expression, as of one to whom life had long ceased to be intelligible.

"This, as you may imagine, is a great shock to me," said Granby. "Your husband wrote to me only a few days ago, asking me to come and see him."

The woman became more communicative.

"Robert," she said, "was taken ill five days ago. We

didn't think it much. Pains in the stomach. A mere nothing, we said. But he didn't get any better and after two days we called in Doctor Peyrolles. But Doctor Peyrolles couldn't come, being ill himself. We were at our wits' end. Then, very kindly, Monsieur le Comte paid us a visit from the château, as he does sometimes, to drink a glass of wine, which is good, is it not, Messieurs?"

"Excellent," murmured Granby.

"We told him of our trouble and he said he would send to us a friend of his who was staying at the château, who was, as it happened, a doctor. The friend of Monsieur le Comte was very kind. He came to see us, though he was very ill himself, poor man, by the look of things. He was even unable to walk to the mill but was carried here by the servants of Monsieur le Comte. He visited my husband two or three times and poor Robert seemed to be getting better. But this morning . . ."

She paused.

"Yes," Granby prompted her gently. "What happened this morning?"

"He seemed to be almost well again. He even rose to receive the friend of Monsieur le Comte, who came to enquire. They were together for nearly an hour, talking by the open window. Then the friend of Monsieur le Comte left us and about half an hour later my husband took a sudden turn for the worse."

Here the woman stopped and began to cry again.

I touched Granby on the arm. He turned and looked at me.

"Hullo," he said, on catching sight of my face. "You're looking very queer all of a sudden."

"Granby," I said, "no wonder the miller died."

Granby looked at me in astonishment.

"The man from the château," I said. "It was Caramac."

Granby looked at me carefully and shook his head.

"My poor friend," he said. "You have got Caramac on the brain."

"It was Caramac," I repeated. "Diana saw him this morning."

"What?"

Granby leaped to his feet, while the woman looked at us vacantly, as though trying to guess what we were saying in a strange tongue.

"I only missed him by a few minutes," I said. "He must have been returning from his visit here."

I gave Granby a rapid account of what had happened on the path leading up to the aqueduct. Granby remained silent for a moment after I had finished. The Provençal sunlight flooded the small enclosure, the water of the Gardon played along the shallows and ran in smooth content in the deeper channel; there was a living wind in the trees on the further bank. But I shivered slightly as I sat with my fingers on the stem of an empty glass. I made a vague gesture.

"Yes," said Granby softly. "I feel it too. We shall meet again at Philippi, what? It must have been a bit of a shock for Diana. Was the poor child much upset?"

"I'm sending her to Nîmes this afternoon. It will change the ideas, as the French say. I shall stand by you until we clear this matter up."

"Then I shall feel quite safe," said Granby, but he pressed my arm affectionately.

Abruptly, he turned to the woman at the table.

"Madame," he said, "did your husband leave any message for me before — before he died?"

"I do not know, Monsieur," she said uncertainly. "He said something in English, but I did not understand. And Father Pozier was with him at the last."

"Is it possible to speak to Father Pozier?" Granby enquired.

"He will be returning presently," said the woman. "He is bringing two sisters from the Convent at Remoulins to keep watch. But you needn't see the good Father. My daughter Rose, who was also present, can tell you what my husband said. She speaks the English."

"If Madame will have the kindness to fetch her," said Granby.

The woman departed and Granby began to walk restlessly back and forth.

"So you think that Caramac had a hand in this, Geoffrey?" he said at last.

"He was here this morning and the man died shortly afterwards."

"But even with Caramac it's hardly safe to assume that whenever he calls at a house the owner necessarily expires."

"But the miller was to give you important information."

"I don't know whether the information was important or not, but I don't like this, Geoffrey. You realize where your suspicions are leading. If Caramac killed the miller he probably knew that the miller was expecting me. In other words, Caramac is deep in this busi-

ness whatever it may be, and I've got him nicely on my hands again. And I'm supposed to be on a holiday."

The door of the yard opened again and a young woman stood before us. She had a pleasant face, but it would never launch a thousand ships. This was presumably Rose, the miller's daughter, but she was not grieving overmuch for her father. On the contrary her eyes were hard.

"You want to know," she said abruptly, as she came towards us, "what it was my father said before he died? I understand the English, but I do not speak it."

We had risen at her approach. Granby motioned her to sit.

"Yes, Mademoiselle?" he prompted.

The miller's daughter was not to be hurried.

"Last night," she said, "he wrote to you at Avignon, and told me to post the message."

"To Avignon?" said Granby. "To the Hôtel Regina, I suppose?"

Rose nodded.

"He said you would be there within the next few days. You had written and told him so, had you not?"

"Yes," said Granby. "I had thought of meeting him there, before deciding to come here. Can you tell me what was in the letter, Mademoiselle?"

The girl shook her head.

"It was not a letter, Monsieur," she answered, "it was a postcard, and I don't know what it meant. But my father" — and here she leaned across the table — "just before he died asked me urgently if I had posted it. I said, 'Yes'. At that, Monsieur, he looked frightened, worried, I don't know how you would describe his

look. Then he said, '*When the English gentleman comes, if he has not already received what I have written, tell him to get it quickly.*' Have you not received the post-card, Monsieur?"

Granby shook his head.

"I will get it to-day." he replied.

"You must get it quickly," repeated Rose. "That was what my father said."

"And was that all?" asked Granby.

"He was delirious just towards the end," replied Rose. "He spoke, you understand, vague words, some French, some English. I didn't really follow much. It was after he had made his confession, you understand, and at least he died with absolution. We must thank the good God that He granted him that."

Her voice grew hard again as she spoke. Evidently she had no love for her father.

"Can you remember nothing of what he said?" persisted Granby.

"But yes," replied Rose. "He kept saying over and over again in French, 'I have hidden it, I have hidden it,' but what he had hidden and where he didn't say. He would not or could not answer when I asked him."

There was silence for a moment.

"That was all?" said Granby again.

"That was all he said in French," replied Rose, "but just on the point of death he raised himself on one elbow and said some words in English. Twice he said them."

"Yes?" prompted Granby.

"It was a strange phrase, Monsieur. I don't know what it means. He turned to me in his agony and whis-

pered the words. They were his last words, Monsieur. '*The League of Discontent.*' That was what he said, Monsieur, twice, and then he fell back dead."

"The League of Discontent," I murmured, unconsciously correcting her pronunciation.

"Do you know what it means, Monsieur?" she said, turning upon me abruptly.

"No, Mademoiselle," I hastened to assure her.

"Then perhaps Monsieur le Colonel?"

Granby shook his head.

"I haven't the least idea," he replied. "That is what I have come to find out."

There was a short silence.

"Perhaps it might be permitted to look at your father's papers?" said Granby at last.

"But certainly," answered Rose. "I will tell my mother."

She left us for a moment.

"What are you going to do?" I asked, as soon as we were alone. "What can this possibly mean?"

"First," said Granby, "we must have a look at his papers. We must then retrieve the postcard. It is a bit of a bore though, for I don't want to leave just yet. I've a notion it might be interesting to pay a visit to Monsieur le Comte."

"Very well," I answered, "I will go to Avignon this afternoon and get the postcard for you."

"Stout fellow," said Granby. "I seem to be upsetting your holiday a bit, but it can't be helped."

We were interrupted by the return of Rose and her mother, bearing between them a large tin box, which they set on the table before us.

"My father's papers," explained Rose. "He kept them in this box underneath his bed."

She unlocked it as she spoke and, lifting the lid, pushed it towards us. Granby began to take the papers out of the tin box, but, before he could examine them, we were interrupted once again. A little man with a black moustache and imperial, resembling, indeed, one of the stage Frenchmen one used to see in an English theatre, came bustling into the yard.

"What sadness! What sadness!" he kept on repeating. "Yes, Madame, I will certainly drink a glass of your excellent wine. He was a good man your husband. This will be a great loss to the parish."

He was introduced to us as Doctor Peyrolles, and he bowed rapidly in our direction several times.

Granby pushed aside the papers and rose.

"Monsieur le Docteur," he said, "a word with you."

He drew him out of earshot and they strolled together by the bank of the Gardon, leaving me with the bereaved mother and daughter.

"Will you go up to the château and tell Marie?" asked Madame Seguin.

"I will not," replied Rose in a firm tone, so firm that it caught my attention. "I will have nothing to do with Marie."

"As you like, my dear," replied Madame Seguin, wilting visibly under the hard eyes of her daughter.

She sighed and looked vaguely about her.

"I suppose I must go myself," she added.

"Do as you please," replied her daughter, "but I will have nothing to do with Marie. If I had my way, she would not come to the funeral."

"Marie," explained Madame Seguin, catching sight of my face, "is my younger daughter, Monsieur. She is in service at the château."

"Service," said Rose, with an unexpected venom. "Service indeed . . ."

She might have said more, for she clearly found it difficult to control her temper. But at that moment Granby returned with the doctor.

"Not a word, not a word, Monsieur le Colonel. You may rely upon my discretion, absolutely — silent as the grave. And the report of the autopsy shall be delivered as soon as possible. I myself will deliver it to you personally."

I looked at Granby.

"Yes," he said in English, answering my unspoken question, "I have suggested a post mortem on the miller. We may as well be sure."

"Look here, Granby," I burst out, "what are you going to do? You said something just now about visiting the château. Do you realise that Caramac is up there, lying in wait . . ."

"As for a prey," concluded Granby. "But what do you suggest?"

"Come to Avignon with me and then, of course . . ."

I paused.

"Well?" said Granby quietly.

"Call in the police," I replied slowly, but even as I spoke, I realised the futility of my suggestion.

"On what evidence?" said Granby.

"The miller is dead," I pointed out.

"But we don't know how he died," returned Granby, "not until we have the results of the post mortem at

any rate. Better leave it to me. You can help me best by going to Avignon. I don't want to leave this place while the scent is still good. I shall look carefully through these papers and meet you for dinner."

"Can't Caramac be arrested?" I began again.

"On what charge?" returned Granby. "He is now living in the odour of sanctity, with a free pardon from the Italian Government. No one can touch him, and he knows it. No, old boy."

"But the château," I said. "You certainly ought not to go there alone."

"That is as it may be," he answered. "I shall probably take a walk after lunch, and if I should happen to be in the neighbourhood, it might be just as well if I called and had a word with Marie."

"So you know about Marie?" I said.

"The other daughter," replied Granby. "The doctor could talk of nothing else. Something odd about that girl. She's the pretty one of the family, and a sore subject. Apple of her father's eye and I shouldn't be surprised to hear that Monsieur le Comte was fond of apples. She ought to be a useful source of information."

I looked at him doubtfully.

"Well," I said at last, "I suppose you'll go your own way."

"I very possibly shall," said Granby. "Meanwhile you'd better go back to the hotel, or Carstairs will be getting anxious about lunch."

I warned him again very solemnly against visiting the château alone. He listened respectfully but with reserve.

"I sha'n't walk up to the front door and ring the bell, if that's what you mean," he said. "But Marie, I understand, is in service. A visit to the servants' hall is indicated and I hope that Marie will prove to be more amiable than Rose."

That was the utmost I could get from him. He wrote for me a chit to the manager of the hotel in Avignon, asking him to hand over the correspondence. Then I made my farewells to Rose and her mother and left him.

Over lunch, I told Diana and Carstairs what had happened. At least I told them enough to explain why it was necessary for me to go to Avignon that afternoon, and we arranged that they should take me there on their way to Nîmes. I said nothing of the visit of Caramac to the mill.

"I hope you don't mind my taking you out of your way," I said, "but you'll get to Nîmes by three o'clock in any case."

"That's all right," said Carstairs, stabbing at his partridge. "But what's it all about, and why can't Granby collect his own correspondence?"

"I suppose Toby was a bit upset to hear that Caramac was in these parts," put in Diana.

"So-so," I replied. "But, you know, Granby isn't easily flustered."

"I'm sorry I took it so badly this morning," said Diana. "But it sha'n't happen again. We aren't going to spoil our holiday because of Caramac. I take it we stay here for to-night?"

"I must see Granby before we leave," I answered. "But there is no reason why you should wait for me. I'll come on to Nîmes after dinner."

"Nonsense," said Diana. "Caramac isn't going to drive me away in a panic. We will leave together — when we do leave."

The subject dropped and half an hour later we were in the car on our way to Avignon. Carstairs beguiled the journey by a vivid and extremely detailed description of Vitellius and his famous Empire pie.

They dropped me at the end of the suspension bridge across the Rhône, and I told them not to come back for me. I would take a taxi out to the Pont du Gard.

They turned the car and I walked off through the gap in the city wall by the Hôtel de l'Europe and so, through the narrow streets, with their mutilated statues of the Virgin and Child at each corner, into the Place de la République and so to the Hôtel Regina, which is close beside it. Here I produced the chit from Granby, authorising me to collect his correspondence. I am not a stranger there and there was no difficulty. They handed me a letter with a typed envelope and a picture postcard of the Pont du Gard.

I then made my way to the Câfé de l'Horloge, where, ordering a glass of vermouth, I sat down to study the postcard.

So this was the miller's message. It was addressed to "Monsieur le Colonel Granby, Hôtel Regina, Avignon," but in the place for correspondence there was nothing but three rows of figures. It was evidently no use my trying to make anything of the cipher, but Granby would probably have the key.

I put it carefully away in my pocketbook, finished my drink and got up to look for a taxi. It was a fine afternoon, but the *mistral* was now blowing hard and,

as I left the sheltered terrace of the café to walk across the square to the taxi rank, the wind lifted my hat from my head and blew it boisterously towards the Rue de la République. I started in pursuit, and was just in time to see it encounter a small lorry, and when the lorry had passed, a glance showed me that the wreck in the road would never be fit to grace my head again.

I am rather particular about my hats, and I spent nearly half an hour in buying a new one. It was therefore past four in the afternoon when I started back in a taxi for the Pont du Gard, and I urged the driver to make good speed. Granby would now, I imagined, be waiting for the postcard, and I remembered the dying words of the miller: it was necessary for Granby to get it quickly. I wondered vaguely why such speed should be necesary. Presumably because the information which the miller had obtained must be acted upon without delay. But what information could be contained in three lines of figures? Whatever the cipher was which the miller had used — and I presumed that, as he had been in Government service, it would be one of the usual Government codes — the message did not seem long enough to give much.

Then a sudden thought struck me. I had already, as you may be sure, very carefully examined the postcard, and it looked to me quite ordinary except for the fact that the message on it was in figures and not in words. Subconsciously, however, as we bowled along that lovely road, I remembered that the address had been written in a different kind of ink — a strong black ink, in fact — while the message was in ink of a paler blue.

I pulled out the postcard and I saw at once what the miller meant about the necessity for speed. While the address was as black and conspicuous as ever, the figures beside it were fainter than they had been. The miller was evidently a careful man. Not only did he write in cipher, but he used sympathetic ink. It was a child's trick, but very useful if you didn't want a piece of information to remain available for too long. I had a sudden panic lest the figures should disappear altogether before I had time to reach Granby. So I memorised them carefully, while I could still read them. I have a queer gift for numbers, and have even adopted a private system of Pelmanism, which consists of translating into figures the name of any place or person I particularly wish to remember. My precaution in memorising the figures on the postcard was fully justified, for by the time I had reached the Pont du Gard they had completely disappeared.

I reached the hotel about five. There I paid off the taxi and enquired at once for Granby. The *patron* informed me that he had not yet returned. Had he then gone to the château after all? It was useless to pursue him thither; so, as Diana and Carstairs would not be back before dinner, I sat in the dining room outside the hotel and amused myself reading Apuleius. It was a copy belonging to Granby, who had lent it to me the evening before. I was chuckling over the adventure of the wife, the lover and the barrel, when I heard footsteps on the earthen floor beside me.

I looked up. Mr. Schlotterbeck, or Richards, as I suppose I must call him, still in his grey tweeds, stood before me. The evening light shining through the trel-

liswork flickered in an odd way over his smiling face. I rose to my feet.

"Good evening, Mr. Carroll," he said. "I have come on behalf of Colonel Granby."

I felt my mouth going dry.

"What has happened?" I asked.

Mr. Richards smiled, and, beckoning to a maid who at that moment appeared, he ordered a drink and sat down opposite me.

"Nothing has happened," he said, "except that Colonel Granby has decided to stay at the château tonight. That is all. As I was walking down this way, he asked me to tell you."

"Why should he want to stay at the château?" I said, my mind in confusion.

Richards smiled.

"The Count de Vallantré," he said, "with whom I also am staying, finds that he knew Colonel Granby's father quite well in the old days. Colonel Granby, moreover, has met a friend at the château. I think you know Monsieur Caramac?"

I stared at Richards, shattered by the smiling audacity of the ex-financier. *I think you know Monsieur Caramac.* Was this perfect innocence or complete cynicism? Mr. Richards was still smiling, the man who had swindled thousands of poor souls out of their small fortunes and was now presuming that I knew Caramac.

"Yes," I said at last, "I know Monsieur Caramac."

"Then perhaps you also know that he is a very sick man. We fear, in fact, that his days are numbered. It is for that reason that Colonel Granby is staying. Monsieur Caramac has certain important information

to give him. Monsieur Caramac is not the man he was."

The ex-financier shook his head. His expression had changed as befitted the theme. It suggested a dying penitent. I began to think as quickly as possible. Granby must be safe for the moment or this man would not be here confessing to his presence at the château. What in any case did Richards want with me? Granby had probably told them at the château that I knew of his visit and would make enquiries. They would accordingly wish to reassure me that all was well.

"How long does Colonel Granby propose to stay with you?" I asked.

"Just for to-night," said Richards easily. "As I was strolling down this way, he asked me to pick up his correspondence. He said you would be fetching it from Avignon."

Richards was smiling again. I began to see the motive of his visit. But how did he know I had been to Avignon? Granby would never have given that fact away. My brain was working at last and I pulled out the letter and the postcard. There could be no harm in giving the man a picture of the Pont du Gard.

"Here is Colonel Granby's correspondence," I said. "One letter and a postcard."

"Thank you so much," responded Richards, holding out his hand. "I have one other little commission," he continued. "The Count de Vallantré hopes that you will all of you lunch with him at the château to-morrow, you, Mrs. Carroll and Mr. Carstairs. He does not often have the opportunity of such pleasant company."

"He is very kind," I murmured conventionally. "I am sure we shall be delighted."

I could see, however, that Richards was not paying any attention to what I said. He was looking at the postcard, which, except for the address, was now completely blank.

"Well," he said, still with his easy smile, "till lunch to-morrow then."

He rose as he spoke and, with a friendly wave of the hand, strolled away between the tables and disappeared behind the trellis.

CHAPTER IV

I DARE TO BE A DANIEL

"What I can't understand," said Carstairs, "or perhaps I should say one of the many things I can't understand, is why your friend Richards so tamely accepted the blank postcard."

We were sitting at dinner, the three of us, in the long dark dining room of the hotel, with its sham Gothic furniture.

"It seems a bit odd," I said.

"Please don't say that again, Geoffrey," begged Diana. "We agree that it is odd. Everything is odd. Oddest of all is the fact that Toby, as soon as your back was turned this afternoon, tripped lightly off to the lions' den."

"You know what Granby is," I said gloomily.

"Dare to be a Daniel, what," said Carstairs, stabbing under protest at his second pigeon. "I should say, however, that he's pretty safe for the moment. So are we all. The people at the château may, as you say, be up to no good, but they've invited us to lunch tomorrow, which is as much as to say there's no deception, ladies and gentlemen. Fullest inspection invited and all that sort of thing. But why did Richards go off so happily with a blank picture postcard of the Pont du Gard?"

This was a long speech for Carstairs, and he leaned back with an air of exhaustion.

"What else could he do?" said Diana. "He couldn't ask Geoffrey to empty his pockets or show the inside of his new hat. He asked for Toby's correspondence and he was bound to take what was offered. He could not go off the deep end because the postcard happened to be blank. Why shouldn't it be blank? Do you always write upon your picture postcards, Geoffrey?"

"Always!" replied Carstairs. "*Lovely time we are having here. Geoffrey.*"

I made a gesture towards a siphon of soda water. Diana hastened to put it out of my reach.

"Besides," she continued, "Mr. Richards may have jumped to the same conclusion as yourself, Geoffrey — namely, that the message on the postcard was written with invisible ink, but he may have thought that in the morning by breathing on it, or whatever you do with messages written in invisible ink, the message would reappear."

"Bright idea," said Carstairs. "Visions of unknown millionaire, lung capacity not up to the average, breathing heavily on postcard. No good. Last breath of Caramac wasted to no purpose. Richards bursts a blood vessel. End of all the sinister chappies who inhabit château."

"This is a nasty one," I stammered. "I never thought of a possible restoration of the message."

"I don't think you need worry about that," said Carstairs. "The miller said 'get it quickly,' which means that the message has gone for keeps."

"But what does it matter about the postcard, anyway?" said Diana. "The question is: Shall we accept that invitation to lunch to-morrow or shall we not?"

"Accept," said David promptly. "The count has probably the best cook in Provence. He might even give us a partridge stuffed with oysters."

We disregarded this.

"Of course, what Richard says may be true," I put in. "Granby may be staying there because he likes it."

"Of course there's Marie," murmured Carstairs. "Your Granby, I understand, has a weakness."

"There is also Caramac," said Diana.

"But Caramac is a ticket-of-leave man," I urged, "and a scalded cat fears cold water. Besides, as David has pointed out, Richards would not have invited us to the château if they intended to do Granby and his chief. It's obvious that they want to avoid suspicion. We shall probably find Caramac on the stool of repentance, telling his beads."

Diana shuddered.

"I quite agree," I said, "it would be a horrid sight."

"Well," said Carstairs gloomily, "let us hope at any rate that the lunch will come up to expectations. I have not yet been entertained by a millionaire. What will it be, I wonder?"

He pushed back his chair and began to declaim with ample gestures:

"My meat shall all come in, in Indian shells,
Dishes of agate, set in gold and studded
With emeralds, sapphires, hyacinths and rubies,
The tongues of carps, dormice and camels' heels,

Boiled i' the spirit of sol and dissolved pearl:
And I will eat these broths with spoons of amber
Headed with diamond and carbuncle
My footboy . . ."

— here he paused and waved a hand negligently at me —

". . . I shall eat pheasants, calvered salmons,
Knots, godwits, lampreys; I myself will have
The beards of barbel served instead of salads;
Oil'd mushrooms . . ."

Here we used the siphon. When peace was restored, Diana said, "It's time we returned to the miller. What was he trying to tell his daughter when he died? What had he hidden? Where had he hidden it? And what on earth did he mean by the League of Discontent?"

"There is so much we would like to know," I complained. "For instance, did somebody try to murder Granby the first evening we were here, with a bow and arrow? Did the miller die a natural death?"

"What's all this about a bow and arrow?" enquired David. "This is the first I've heard about it."

I rapidly told them about the arrow shot at Granby on the previous evening. Carstairs made light of it.

"We're all a bit inclined to be morbid," he said. "We have really nothing to go upon. Granby says the boy was shooting owls. He was shooting pigeons this morning after breakfast and nearly got me instead."

The discussion languished. We were all tired of going over the same ground for the twentieth time, and inclined to welcome almost any diversion, when the

maid brought in a dish of tomatoes. Incidentally she also brought me a message.

"Monsieur le Docteur is here," she announced. "He wishes to speak to the Colonel Granby."

"Tell him — " began Carstairs, but I raised my hand.

"I will go and see the doctor," I said, and slipped quickly from the room.

Doctor Peyrolles was waiting in the passage outside the dining room. I drew him into a little office on the further side.

"I am afraid Colonel Granby is not here," I said, "but, if you have any message, I can give it to him."

The little doctor's face was grave.

"I have the honour to address," he began.

"Monsieur Carroll, a friend of Colonel Granby. I was with him, you may remember, at the mill this morning."

'Yes," said the doctor brightly, "I remember now. Well, Monsieur Carroll, it is like this. Colonel Granby, as perhaps you know, asked me to perform an autopsy on the body of Robert Seguin. He seemed to think that . . . that it was desirable. Naturally, in my position, one must be careful. But since the Colonel had obtained the consent of Madame Seguin, there was no reason why I should not do as he desired. I carried out the autopsy this afternoon."

He paused, and fumbling in his pocket, produced a packet of cigarettes. Hurriedly I offered my case.

"Try one of these," I said.

"Thank you," he replied.

I struck a match and held it to his cigarette.

"Yes," I said, "and what was the result?"

"The result, Monsieur," said Doctor Peyrolles slowly, "was that I was unable to find the cause of death, though I think it probable that he died of a bad heart. That organ was distended, but I should not have said that the distention was such as to cause death in normal circumstances. I therefore decided that a further examination was necessary." He paused. "I had no suspicions, no suspicions at all," he added hastily. "But there was a doubt. It was clearly a case for the analyists. I accordingly removed the usual organs and placed them in the proper jars, you understand. These I sealed in the presence of the widow and took them away with me to my small dispensary."

"I am sure you acted very wisely, Monsieur le Docteur," I said. "And when may we expect the analyst's report?"

"It is unnecessary, I think, to comment on my action," rejoined the doctor tartly, and I perceived that he was not a man to be hurried or encouraged.

"I beg your pardon," I murmured.

"I left the mill about five o'clock this afternoon," he continued. "You can understand that the autopsy took some time and my ordinary work was in arrears. I had several patients whom it was necessary for me to see. I accordingly deposited the jars in my dispensary, as I have said. I then went upon my rounds and did not return home until half an hour ago. I then had occasion to visit my dispensary to make up a medicine." He paused, obviously ill at ease.

"Well," I prompted.

"Monsieur Carroll," he said, "I saw at once that the

jars containing the organs for analysis were no longer on the shelf where I had left them."

"What is that?" I asked quickly.

"They were no longer there," repeated the doctor.

"Are you sure of the exact place where you left them?"

"Quite sure."

"One of your servants may have removed them."

He shook his head.

"I have looked everywhere," he said. "I have also questioned my housekeeper without any success. She was out this afternoon upon various errands. She had left the house locked, and it was still locked when she returned. Besides, no one is ever allowed in my dispensary."

"Was the dispensary also locked?"

"But of course," said the doctor. "And the only keys are my own. They were never out of my possession."

"Keys?" I repeated. "There is more than one door, then, to the dispensary?"

"There is an outside door and an inside door," replied the doctor. "The outside door opens into the garden. The dispensary, if you wish to know, was once a small greenhouse or conservatory."

"Has it a complicated lock?" I asked.

"Quite simple, Monsieur," he answered. "I only keep a few harmless drugs there. My dangerous drugs are kept in the safe in my bedroom."

"It was a pity," I said, "that you didn't put the jars in the safe."

"Impossible, Monsieur," he said testily. "The jars were too large."

We were both silent for a moment.

"You infer then that the jars were stolen?" I said at last.

"What else can I infer?" said the doctor.

"You realize what this means, there could be no possible motive for stealing the jars unless the person who took them was afraid that . . ."

The doctor held up his hand.

"I will not go into that," he said hastily.

"You will of course notify the police?"

"Of course," he replied.

There was a further pause.

"Well, Monsieur le Docteur," I said, "I will give Colonel Granby your message as soon as he returns."

He rose. I bowed. He stood awkwardly beside his chair and did not offer to leave.

"And my fee?" he muttered at last.

"I beg your pardon," I said.

"Colonel Granby promised to pay me five hundred francs for the autopsy," continued the little man, flushing miserably.

Embarrassed more for his sake than my own, I pulled a note from my pocketbook and handed it to him. He then wrote a receipt for the money and I accompanied him to the door of the hotel. As I entered the dining room again, I heard the sound of his car moving away in the darkness.

"Your *tomates provençales* were getting cold, so I ate them," said Carstairs simply.

"Thanks," I said absently.

I sat down and found both Carstairs and Diana

looking at me with some curiosity. It was Diana who spoke.

"What is it, Geoffrey?" she asked.

I told them briefly of my interview with the doctor. They heard me out in silence.

"Well," said Carstairs when I had finished, "now we know."

"Yes," I said. "It was a case of unnatural death."

"You're quite sure?" said Diana.

"There can be no other explanation," I replied. "No one would steal the jars except to destroy the evidence."

"What are we to do?" I continued.

"Why not telephone to the château?" suggested Carstairs. "Ask for Granby. They can't refuse to let you speak to him and he ought to be warned of the new development."

"You forget," I pointed out, "it's too late to telephone. The exchange in these parts closes at seven."

I rose from the table and took a turn down the room and back again.

"Look here," I continued, "there's only one thing to do. I must go to the château myself."

"No, Geoffrey."

It was Diana who spoke.

"It's the only way," I protested. "It's essential to warn Granby and incidentally to find out whether he is being forcibly detained."

"I don't see how you can improve matters by getting forcibly detained yourself," objected Carstairs.

"On the contrary," I said. "The position at present

is this: We can't call in the police. There isn't a shred of evidence against any one at the château. We can't prove that they poisoned the miller. We don't even know that Granby is under restraint. We have nothing whatever to go upon."

"I see," said Carstairs, "you propose to go to the château so that you may be laid by the heels in order to give us a good and sufficient reason for calling in the police."

"Or to ascertain what is happening to Granby."

"I can't say that I think much of the idea," said Carstairs.

"It's a perfectly sound idea," I retorted. "And the risk is not as great as it looks. I shall reconnoitre the château and call openly if necessary. If I do not return, you will notify the police. Rub it in about the jars. That will at least create a suspicion. Lay a formal charge to the effect that to your certain knowledge Granby and I are being forcibly detained. The police will then have to act and the people at the château will know that as well as we do. And if they can't see it for themselves, I shall make it my business to bring it home."

Carstairs clasped his head.

"I see what Geoffrey means," said Diana slowly. "And I think he is right."

"They poisoned the miller," Carstairs pointed out.

"It's a risk we are taking," I admitted, "but I don't see how we can avoid it."

Carstairs rose wearily from his chair.

"Then I'd better be going," he said.

"Nonsense, David," I protested. "This is my job."

"The château," said Carstairs, "is no place for a married man."

I looked at Diana.

She hesitated a moment and then said.

"You're right, Geoffrey. David doesn't really come into this business."

"Don't I indeed?" said Carstairs. "It strikes me that we shall all be in it sooner or later. Granby has gone to the château to find Marie; Geoffrey is going to see his friend and I shall certainly go to lunch to-morrow. Diana will go because she doesn't like to be left out. Otherwise she would run away to Monte and leave us to follow in our own good time."

I settled the matter by rising from the table, and five minutes later I was ready to start.

It was beautifully fine outside and, but for the wind, the night would have been perfect. I carried an electric torch in my pocket, for I knew it would be hard to see the way. Diana accompanied me for the first hundred yards or so to the mouth of the leafy corridor in which we had walked that morning.

"Take care of yourself, old thing," she said, as I turned to leave her.

"Don't you worry," I said.

She kissed me and pushed me suddenly away.

I heard her light footsteps returning down the path. Then I turned and began to grope my way steadily upwards, using my torch as little as possible. It was quiet on the path itself. The wind a few yards above my head roared and whistled, but had little effect on the thick undergrowth. I caught a glimpse of stars now and again, but for the most part I moved in dark-

ness. The landlord had told me that the château was about twenty minutes' walk from the hotel, but he had meant twenty minutes in daylight, so that I was not surprised when, at the end of that time, I was still pushing my way along the shrouded alley.

Soon I began to feel the wind, for I had been mounting steadily. The general direction of the path was left-handed, and the Pont du Gard was now behind me about half a mile or so to my right. I walked on steadily, stumbling occasionally over roots and stones. My mind was not continuously on my surroundings but drifted to other matters. What should I find at the château? What was Caramac doing there? What was the meaning of that phrase: The League of Discontent? It had an ominous ring. Why was Granby staying at the château?

Abruptly I came to the end of the path. It was like emerging from a tunnel. Before me, in the darkness, stretched an open space, how large I could not determine, and in the midst of it was a low dark pile of buildings, whose form and size it was difficult to measure.

I walked across the space, looking vainly in the blackness for some hint of a light to which I could direct my footsteps. Presently I found myself off the path and treading on what felt like soft turf. I stopped a moment to take my bearings, and, straining my eyes, perceived a dim colonnade on my left hand, a row of slim pillars, which I could just see in silhouette against the sky. They appeared to support nothing more substantial than a single stone transom. I moved towards it slowly, thinking that, if I followed the pillars, I

should come to some inhabited part of the house. I found, however, that the pillars were quite separate from the main building. They enclosed, on inspection, a large demilune, perhaps fifty yards across, and I could hear in the darkness the splashing of a fountain somewhere in the middle. There was a faint gleam of statues between the pillars, but in the starlight I could not see what they were.

I retraced my steps, flashing my torch now and again, till I had regained the path. Then I moved forward once more, intending to approach the main building. The illuminated dial on my wrist watch showed that it was not yet eleven o'clock.

I moved another hundred yards or so and now I was close to the château. It was still too dark to see what it was like. My foot struck against something and I stopped a moment. Then I saw that I had reached the foot of half a dozen shallow stone steps leading, apparently, to a terrace. I climbed them slowly and at the top I paused again to get my bearings. There, for the first time, I saw a light away to my left. I moved to one side and, abruptly a great window about twenty yards away glowed orange in the night.

Between it and myself stood a pedestal with a statue upon it of a black man, naked, with woolly hair. But I was not for the moment interested in sculpture, and I moved straight to the window.

I had gone perhaps ten yards when I heard a slight rustling behind me. I looked quickly round.

The statue had disappeared.

I gazed stupidly at the bare pedestal. What had happened? Where was this thing I had seen a moment

ago? For an instant I knew absolute panic. Then came the shock of reality. Thick greasy fingers gripped me by the throat and the back of the neck, so that I could not make a sound. I was shaken to and fro. The orange window waxed and waned.

The sun is rising, was my last coherent thought, as I sank into unconsciousness.

CHAPTER V

I DELIVER MY MESSAGE

There was a buzzing somewhere, something between a hoot and a wail, which ran up and down the scale, for all the world like Aunt Letitia trying to tune in on the wireless. Suddenly there rose before me a large forbidding woman in a black bonnet with jet bugles, light flashing from a hundred angles. And that was odd, for Aunt Letitia was small and merry. She was standing in a pine-railed witness box, supported by Granby in an Eton suit, and she was pointing an enormous finger in the direction of Mr. Julius Schlotterbeck, who, wearing the broad arrows of infamy, smiled blandly from the dock. The buzzing came from the judge, who was summing up. If Julius Schlotterbeck was not yet condemned, why was he dressed like a convict? It was all puzzling — very puzzling indeed. And now they all faded suddenly and there was darkness lit with gigantic fire balls that waxed and waned. I was floating in the curious land that you can only see when you shut your eyes and turn your face to the light. The noise was still there but now it was different. Soon perhaps I should be able to distinguish what it was. Meanwhile, the fire balls were growing smaller, and, abruptly, as though a door had opened, a flood of sound — real music this time — stole upon my ears, a plangent melody from violins, and, after a time, a man's voice singing. Pres-

ently I could distinguish the words, a kind of refrain that came at intervals:

"Que vaut toute votre philosophie
Contre un sofa dans un boudoir?"

I opened my eyes. The first thing they saw was a painted ceiling of intricate design; cupids, Venus in a great conch, satyrs lurking among reeds, nymphs pursued and running, not too fast, from a burning Apollo. A line from Browning floated into my mind: "And one Pan, ready to twitch the Nymph's last garment off." All these pictures, painted with pagan simplicity, were set in an elaborate pattern of trumpets and other musical instruments, intermingled with weapons of the chase, shields, brazen corselets and polished greaves. There was Ariadne, naked and tearful, her face towards the sea, unperceiving Bacchus, who, flushed and rosy, was stepping from his gilded car, his arms spread to take her; and round a corner, half-hidden by a cornice of painted stucco, appeared the smooth arm and breast of Andromeda, huddled against the rock, in terror from the sea beast, unwitting of Perseus who, in gilded panoply, hovered to strike through the clear southern air.

I turned upon my side, and perceived that I was lying on a couch of yellow silk, finely wrought in the style of Louis XV. Again the voice came to my ears. What was the man singing?

"Quelle est la femme qui soit sage
Sur son sofa dans son boudoir?"

I rose into a sitting position and ran my left hand

through my hair. But the effort was too much. A feeling of sudden nausea overwhelmed me and I fell back again on the couch, closing my eyes. That interval was dreamless and I was next aroused to consciousness by the laughter of women.

This time, on opening my eyes, I perceived that the sofa of yellow silk had been moved into an alcove partially screened from the remainder of the room. The floor stretched away in front of me, polished and gleaming like black ice. The roof, poised on slim pillars of dark blue marble, was painted all over in the same fashion as the alcove. A series of tall windows ran down one side, curtained with heavy silk, and at the end was a great mirror in several pieces, for the room it seemed, was a contemporary of the Palace at Versailles and had been made, therefore, in the days when they had not learned how to cast a big reflecting surface and so built up their mirrors of small squares. It was from behind the mirror that the music proceeded — playing now a minuet of Cimarosa. The air was scented and there seemed to my excited fancy to be a blue miasma floating about the great chamber — some Pythian vapour that made the senses reel and the mind desire unutterable things.

The music swelled softly from behind the mirror. In the midst of the room a party was assembled dancing to the sound of it. Watching the group was a large, thickset man, clean-shaven and dressed in the white satin of the Court of Louis XV, sitting upon a divan to the left. He had shoes with high red heels and wore a white powdered wig, knotted at the back with a black silk ribbon. The women, I am compelled to record,

wore nothing at all. And so they danced very formally, to the old music of Cimarosa. There was something deliberately grotesque about it all. The formal music and measure called for abundance of fine satin and laces and emphasized with malicious perversity the nakedness of the dancers.

But presently the light changed and a tide of colour, purple and green and blue, swept across the room over the gleaming bodies, then glaring white and soft red. The music too was altered; no longer the chamber airs of the seventeenth century, but music of the gypsies, rhythmic, exciting, playing on the nerves, beating on the brain. The man in the satin suit stirred on his couch. His hand twitched to the rhythm and suddenly, rising to his feet, he walked into the midst of the dance, caught one of the girls by the waist and passed with her across the gleaming floor, till they stumbled through the folds of a heavy curtain and were lost to sight.

"*Encore Marie,*" said a voice, as I raised myself on an elbow. "The *patron* is becoming almost constant in his affections."

I got with difficulty to my feet and stood a moment on the polished floor of the great room. I suppose I must have made a certain amount of noise in rising, for the group of girls who had been dancing turned with one accord and regarded me. There was a look of surprise in their eyes, which changed to a different emotion — pity, I think — but I cannot be sure. For at that instant I must have fallen to the floor, and I remember nothing else till I recovered for the third time and found myself once more lying on the yellow couch.

"That's better," said some one, and I became aware

that I was drinking something. It burned my throat and left a pleasant sensation of warmth behind it.

"Careful, Aspasia," came a voice in French, "do not give him too much."

I was aware of a smooth arm and a hand clasping a goblet of cut glass stretched out towards me. Aspasia had just withdrawn the goblet from my mouth. She had bright yellow hair and eyes set wide apart in a pink-and-white face. She wore a single garment of white silk and was seated on the knees of the man whom I had first seen watching the minuet.

I looked at him with interest. This, presumably, was the Count de Vallantré. His face was soft and rubicund, with thin lips and a heavy jowl, the eyes, which were small, set a trifle close together. The nose was broad at the base, the ears flat and close against the skull. He reminded me of some one.

"So," he said, perceiving that I was observing him, "you feel better, do you? I am sorry you should have been so unfortunately received. Archimedes is a faithful fellow, but he has never learned his own strength. He assures me that he never really meant to hurt you."

"Archimedes?" I murmured, trying hard to collect my wits.

"My faithful Negro," he explained. "It seems you were trying to pay us a visit. Needless to say, I am delighted to receive you."

He spoke with scarcely a trace of accent, but I perceived at once that he was not English.

"*Le pauvre homme*," said the lady known as Aspasia, regarding me with a mixture of pity and contempt,

"he has suffered at the hands of that savage. Shall I order Archimedes to be whipped, perhaps?"

The man shook his head.

"No, my lass," he replied, "Archimedes is an excellent fellow. But, as I say, he doesn't know his own strength.

"Time you were going," he added, patting her bare shoulder. "We are looking forward to that little tableau."

The girl obediently slipped from his knees and with a smile and a twist of her lithe figure turned and left us. The man looked after her for a moment with appreciation. Then he shook his head.

"I am growing old," he said sadly.

He turned to me with a queer smile on his thin lips.

"Well, Master Christopher Sly," he continued, "I hope you admired your awakening. We staged it pretty well for you on the whole. But the best is to come. I've taken quite a lot of trouble over the tableau."

I looked at him, wondering what to say. I even made to speak, but rubbed the back of my neck instead. It was beginning to feel very stiff and sore.

"Mr. Carroll," the man continued, "you are, I gather, the friend of the enterprising Colonel Granby, and I have the honour to be your host for this occasion . . . the Count de Vallantré, at your service."

He bowed from the waist, and gestured with a pudgy hand. There were reddish hairs, fairly thick upon the back of it and the fingers were loaded with rings. Suddenly I realized of whom he reminded me. In other clothes and in another setting, he would have borne a

very fair resemblance to the portrait of Henry VIII by Holbein.

"You are right," I said at last. "My name is Carroll and I came here to have a word with Colonel Granby. I lost my way in the garden and one of your servants, a nigger, assaulted me violently. I think, Count, that you owe me an explanation."

The Count de Vallantré seemed to be shocked.

"Nigger?" he protested. "I beg you will not call Archimedes a nigger. He is a man of uncertain temper and the consequences might be unfortunate, believe me. Archimedes is a prince in his own land — of the blood royal. I apologise for his conduct. No one regrets it more than I do, except that it has offered me an opportunity of making your acquaintance sooner than I expected. I hope you appreciate the setting."

He looked complacently about him as he spoke.

"My resources here are limited," he sighed. "But we do our best. And the ladies are charming. Variety is difficult to achieve but I flatter myself that my household is — what shall we say? — fairly representative. Every clime and colour has its charm. *'I am black but comely, oh, ye daughters of Jerusalem'* — but I needn't finish the quotation."

A light began to smoulder in his piggy eyes and a silly smile came and went upon his lips, so that I perceived he was a little drunk.

I rose unsteadily to my feet.

"You will excuse me, Count," I said, "but I came to see Colonel Granby. With your permission . . ."

"Colonel Granby has retired for the night," broke in the count. "He is one of your Spartan fellows — a

regular Anthony. His temptations this evening were many and various — what we might call the chance of a lifetime — but he quite failed to respond."

The count rose as he spoke and took me by the arm.

"Come, Mr. Carroll, the tableau is ready by now."

He motioned in the direction of the heavy curtain at the further end of the room.

I shook my head. It was an unfortunate gesture, for a stab of pain darted from between my eyes to the back of my neck and I sat down upon the divan.

"You must excuse me, Count," I murmured. "Your Negro servant . . ."

I left the sentence unfinished.

The count walked to a small table beside us.

"Drink this," he said, and, pouring something into a cut-glass goblet, he handed it to me.

I hesitated.

"It's all right," he urged. "Snick up, as Toby Belch would say, and you will feel perfectly fit in a few hours. I take it myself. Wonderful stuff. Nothing like it."

Still doubtful, but overwhelmed with a sense of terrible fatigue, I raised the goblet to my lips and drank.

As I did so, a series of appalling sounds came from somewhere out of sight, at the end of the long room. They were divided, like the longs and shorts of the Morse code — screams more or less prolonged alternating with sharp cracks as of a whip. So unnerving were the sounds that I nearly dropped the goblet.

"God!" I stammered.

The count smiled.

"That will be Wamba," he said. "Distressing, is it not, but it will soon be over."

Even as he spoke, the cries dwindled in volume until they sank into a dreadful moaning and gradually died away altogether.

Then, suddenly, a figure appeared noiselessly from behind the yellow curtains which wavered and swam before my tired gaze. It was of huge size, a giant to my imagination and in its hand was a long whip which left a trail of red as he flicked it on the smooth floor. I seemed in his grinning features and staring eyeballs to recognise Archimedes. The count said something sharply in an unknown tongue. The Negro bowed and silently left the room.

"Wamba," said the Count, "was careless. Next time perhaps he will shoot his arrow straight."

I stared at him in bewilderment, and pressing a hand to my forehead, tried to follow what the count was saying. Of course it was Wamba and he had been punished. He had been shooting owls and he had missed Granby.

So they had tried to murder Granby yesterday in the garden after all

"Good God!" I began again.

But the count laid a hand on my arm.

"Don't try to think," he said. "It will all come clear in the morning. Meanwhile you had better be taken to the dovecote. You will be quieter there and in excellent company."

My brain was swimming under the influence of the drug which he had given me. What was the dovecote? The word had a soothing sound. If the count would only stop talking. . . .

"Lovely ceiling," he was saying, and dimly I saw a

huge hand gesturing not far away. The motion hurt my eyes.

"Julio Romano painted it," the count went on, "or perhaps one of his pupils, but I prefer to detect the hand of the master himself. That satyr over there in the bulrushes, for instance . . . so lifelike and so indelicate. *Naturam furca expellas tamen usque recurret.*"

But the couch upon which I was lying — for somehow I was on my back again — began to move, and I perceived that it was being lifted by four stalwart Negroes. The grinning face of Archimedes appeared upside down in the background and the couch swayed dizzily across the polished floor, past the curtain from behind which came sounds of laughter and little gasps. Then once more I lost consciousness and this time fell into a heavy sleep.

I awoke to find the thin face of Granby bending over me.

"Hullo, old boy," he was saying, "so you are waking up at last, are you?"

I sat up slowly.

"Granby," I said vaguely, "what are we doing here? And where is it?"

He laid a hand on my shoulder.

"Steady the Buffs," he urged. "Feeling better now?"

"I feel extraordinarily well," I said, getting to my feet, and, to be sure, my head was clear, and, beyond a slight stiffness in the neck, I felt as fit as a fiddle and rather hungry. Moreover my mind was working again. I had come to find Granby and to tell him something.

"Granby," I said, "I have got a message for you. Caramac has stolen the jars."

Granby's eyebrows went up.

"Jars?" he echoed.

"Jars," I repeated. "You remember the miller? The doctor was not satisfied with his autopsy. So he removed the usual organs and put them in sealed jars. The jars were stolen this afternoon."

Granby was silent a moment.

"So now we know," he said at last.

Then he turned and inspected me with a doleful air.

"I'm sorry you've come into this, Geoffrey," he said. "What on earth possessed you to walk into the château?"

"Force of example," I replied. "You came here first."

"That's quite another story. It's my job to take these risks. And Marie was worth it let me tell you . . . I met her by the garden gate and I only wish she had not been quite so affectionate. She is a minx, Geoffrey, and I was nearly beginning to think she was an angel. How easily is one deceived on an autumn afternoon in Provence. We were going to have a heart-to-heart talk together. She was going to tell me everything and I was going to help her to escape the amorous persecutions of the count. She suggested the dovecote and brought me here so that we might be undisturbed."

Granby paused.

"And then?" I prompted.

"And then, I'm sorry to say, she locked me in, and left me dolorously quoting the bard:

'The Gods are just, and of our pleasant vices,
Make instruments to plague us.' "

"Well," I said, "here we are."

Granby took a turn up and down the room.

"Tell me, Geoffrey," he went on, "did you just walk up casually to the front door, or were you caught like a thief in the night? And did you by any chance tell the others you were coming?"

"Of course I told the others I was coming. What's more I told Diana and David that if we didn't return or send them a message they were to notify the police at Remoulins first thing in the morning. What is the time?"

"Five o'clock in the afternoon," said Granby, looking at his watch.

"What?" I exclaimed.

"Yes, my boy. You've overslept yourself this time and no mistake."

Five o'clock in the afternoon, and the police had not arrived. What were Diana and David doing?

"There's another thing," said Granby. "Did you get that correspondence of mine at Avignon?"

"I did. It was a postcard, and I gave it to Richards."

Granby stared at me in consternation.

"Don't look at me like that," I said crossly. "The card when I gave it to Richards was blank. The miller had used some sort of sympathetic ink. It had already begun to fade when I recovered it from the hotel. That's why he wanted you to get it quickly."

"I wonder how Richards knew about the postcard," said Granby. "Of course," he added, "Marie must have told him, having learnt it from her father." He paused.

"Did you read it yourself?" he asked at length.

"I read a row of figures."

Granby nodded.

"Yes," he said. "Seguin used the DX code. But it won't be much use to us now the figures have gone."

"On the contrary," I said triumphantly, "I've got them here."

I tapped my forehead.

Granby chuckled.

"Good man. Of course, I remember, you never forget numbers. A sort of free advertisement for the great Pelman. But hold on to those figures, old boy, and as soon as I can lay hands on the key to the cipher, which is in my despatch case, we'll see what it is old Seguin was trying to tell us. And that means that we have got to get away from this place as soon as possible."

While Granby was speaking I had time to examine our quarters. We were in a circular room, quite bare except for a divan running all round the wall. The wall, at a certain height above the floor, was pierced by a number of holes at regular intervals, about the height of a man's head. I looked through one of them, and saw, beneath me, at some considerable distance — thirty or forty feet — part of a formal garden, bounded on one side by the demilune of pillars into which I had blundered the previous evening. The château lay beyond it, low and squat in the evening light.

From above our heads came a flutter of wings, a patter of tiny feet and an intermittent cooing of pigeons.

"Have you seen the count?" I asked.

"Have I not!" said Granby. "He sent for me shortly

after Marie had locked me up. He was most hospitable and offered me the choice of many queer delights. But I was not to be caught that way again — though it's pretty hard to be always on parade, so to speak. However, the snares of the devil are many and I did so far forget myself as to accept a cocktail. The rest, as Shakespeare says, is silence. I woke up here."

"You discovered nothing?"

"Nothing," he echoed. "Your Uncle Granby was caught, and he was left, napping. This has been one of my bad days. I'm a disgrace to the Service and I only hope that I shall live never to regret it. This is what comes of disturbing a fellow on his holiday, and I know now what poor old Homer felt like when they caught him nodding."

"One thing more," I said slowly.

Granby looked at me quizzically.

"I know what you're going to say," he said. "The answer is in the negative. I have not seen Caramac — not a glimpse of him. But I feel that is only a pleasure deferred."

At that instant there came the sound of footsteps outside and then of a key in the lock. We turned simultaneously.

The door was thrown open and Archimedes, in a neat suit of white ducks, stood framed in the entrance.

"Monsieur Caramac," he announced solemnly. "He wish for to see you, sars."

CHAPTER VI

I GO TO THE DEVIL

We rose together and moved towards the door which had been flung wide by the Negro. Granby, as he passed me, stumbled slightly and half fell against the man. He recovered himself at once, however, and stepped forward.

"Let's make a bolt for it," I suggested.

"No good," said Granby. "The fuzzy-wuzzy is armed. I felt his hip pocket."

I did not urge the matter, for at that instant I saw what awaited us outside — a splendid escort of no less than twelve Negro footmen sumptuously attired in what I suppose was the count's livery. They were drawn up in the path which led past the demilune to the castle some three hundred yards away.

At a word from Archimedes, they turned smartly and accompanied us at a respectful distance, marching six to the right and six to the left, along the borders of the path. Their woolly heads were powdered and upon their broad backs was good red cloth, lavishly covered with gold braid. Their black silk breeches and white stockings ended in shiny shoes with broad buckles.

"I can't believe it," said Granby, looking at these splendid figures. "We've somehow strayed into Charlie Cochran's next-but-one revue at the Pavilion."

I did not answer. The savage handling which I had received from Archimedes on the previous evening, followed by many hours of drugged sleep, had left me, though without a headache or any bodily ill, with a curious lightness of mind and body. I felt as though I were stepping on air; my limbs were hollow and my mind refused its office. I had become a figure in a pageant. This was a scene that Fragonard or Boucher might have painted. Before me there was the castle, enlivened with a profusion of every kind of baroque device and carving, and over my left shoulder I could still see the pillars of the demilune, slim and tall, some partially overgrown by creeping plants. The water of the fountain itself was gleaming in the afternoon light and in the midst of it was a Venus with arms uplifted and streaming hair. Round the corner we must meet a bevy of court ladies in their great hooped skirts and bodices slipping from their shoulders.

"Steady the Buffs," came a voice in my ear, and I perceived that I was moving so fast as almost to be running.

In a moment or two we had reached the château. We entered by a small side door, passing beneath a heavy cornice supported by two pillars twisted like barley sugar, into a corridor lit by a curious arrangement of windows in the roof. The sunlight streaming through a number of round panes, set obliquely, was reflected on the white walls and marble floor, so that we walked — for the panes of the glass were blue — in a kind of aqueous twilight.

We proceeded in silence down the corridor towards

a great door of carved olivewood which Archimedes, after knocking upon it, flung wide open.

We entered a high room, lined on all sides save one with books in old yellow bindings. The third wall was pierced by long windows through which the afternoon sunlight streamed, and between them was a great desk of walnut, bronze and ebony, with inkstands and quill pens upon it. In one corner was a globe, and by the big hearth to our left, a lean Borzoi raised an inquisitive head.

But it was not at the room or at its appointments that I glanced, for beside the desk, in striking contrast with its ancient furnishings, stood a wheel chair, fitted with all the latest devices for a modern invalid and within the chair sat a figure I knew well, on whom my straying wits were instantly riveted.

"Good afternoon, Colonel," came a soft voice, with a slight French accent. "And you too, Mr. Carroll. It is some time since we met."

The thin face of Jean Caramac glimmered white as he leaned forward from the invalid chair and, with a wave of his slim hand, directed us towards two Louis XV armchairs upon which we obediently sat down. We faced the light and Caramac was in shadow, but I looked at him eagerly and saw at once that what Oldsby had said in his letter was true. The man was dying. Only the bright eyes, cold and clear, like those of a snake, were alive. The rest was a dead parchment, stretched taut over delicately moulded bones. The thin hair on the head was snow-white. The shrunken body was clothed in a black velvet coat. A dark rug was thrown across the knees, upon which the lean fingers

stood out like the white notes of a piano. He might have been some reverend aged ecclesiastic sinking peacefully to his end after years spent in the Councils of the Vatican.

But the man before me was Jean Caramac, whose schemes we had once brought to nothing, whose desperate bid for dominion we had frustrated, who had languished because of us on a torrid island off Naples, among smugglers, drug pedlars and other undesirables kept there by the vigilant Italian Government.

There was a silence for a moment, broken by the fall of a small book bound in yellow leather, which slipped from the knees of Caramac. Instinctively I bent forward and retrieved it.

"Thank you, Mr. Carroll," he said, as I laid it on the desk.

The white hand moved from the rug and picked up the volume.

"You would be interested in this," said Caramac. "It is an early eighteenth-century edition of the travels of Sir John Mandeville, an amusing person foisted by an ingenious mediæval scholar upon your country as the father of English prose. It is indeed a pity, I think, that no such person existed, but we must congratulate John the Bearded upon the brilliance of his fancy. I have been translating his 'Guide to the Holy Land.' It served to pass the time." He opened the book and began to read:

"Some men clepe it the Vale Enchanted; some clepe it the Vale of Devils and some clepe it the Vale Perilous. And in the mid place of that Vale, under a rock, is the head and visage of a Devil, full dreadful and hor-

rible to see. And we entered that valley fifteen persons, but at our going out we were but nine.

"The Devil's Head in the Valley Perilous," he repeated softly, laying the book down. "I wonder if that valley was more desolate, more shattering to the spirit than the Islands of the *Confinati*."

I met his gaze and I saw in those cold eyes a hatred so implacable that instinctively I shrank in my chair.

"You are a lucky man, Doctor," said Granby in a tone that showed he was quite unimpressed. "The major political prisoners who go to the Islands of the *Confinati* are seldom released. The concordat happened very well for you."

"Caffarelli is a great man," said Caramac smoothly. "But he has his foibles. He would not be so great perhaps without them. He models himself upon the mighty Julius, who liked always to be magnanimous. But I am forgetting my duties."

He touched a small bronze knob set in a slab of onyx at his elbow.

"I owe you both an apology," he went on. "I should have received you some hours ago. I have not been at all well of late. My friends, indeed, seem quite anxious about me."

He smiled as he spoke, a smile such as might have appeared on the face of Mona Lisa's brother had he been painted by Leonardo.

"But I am not dead — yet," he added quietly, "and a dying man is dangerous. He has so little to lose."

I became aware of Archimedes, who was bowing deferentially towards the figure in the invalid chair.

The big Negro was now in the full panoply of a Master of the Household, Groom of the Chambers, or whatever his master might be pleased to call him — wearing a more gaudy edition of the uniform of the footmen.

"Some of the old Amontillado," said Caramac quietly.

The Negro withdrew, to reappear a moment later with two glasses of amber wine upon a tray superbly chased with a design of dolphins and mermaids.

"You will excuse me if I do not join you," said Caramac as we took our glasses of blown Venetian ware. "But I am my own physician and, though I am fond of sherry, I do not advise it."

"Hard lines," murmured Granby.

He set down the glass.

"Is it possible," he asked, upon a note of awe. "It cannot be, and yet it is . . . '48."

Caramac nodded and something of a twinkle appeared in his eyes.

"'48 it is, my dear Colonel, a year of revolutions — 'full of massacres and the tragical ends of princes.' Our host, you must admit — what is your English phrase — does us very well."

"He does indeed," replied Granby. "To smoke with such a wine would be an insult."

I hastily put away my cigarette case.

There was a short silence. I looked covertly at Caramac, but could read nothing in his face. He was sitting well back in his chair, his head and shoulders being in shadow. The silence deepened, and after a while I began to feel, as I know he intended us to feel, profoundly uneasy. He was giving us time to realize how

completely we were in his hands — the slim nervous hands that lay upon the dark rug but which might at any moment become the merciless great hands of Archimedes, choking out life. I stirred in my chair.

"Not a pleasant thought, I agree," said Caramac quietly. "But most appropriate to the situation."

I flushed with mortification. This was an old trick of Caramac. How often had he echoed my most secret thoughts.

"Your friend the colonel," he continued, "is still enjoying his wine. I do not wish to hurry you, but we have certain matters to discuss. Before we begin, Messieurs, let me impress upon you both the futility of violence. I think it only fair to mention that the slightest pressure of my foot" — here there was a movement beneath the folds of the rug — "will bring upon the scene some impressive reinforcements — hardy, simple fellows, from French Equatorial Africa, in fact. We shall, therefore, conduct this conversation upon equal terms."

Granby set down an empty glass.

"At your service, Doctor," he said. "And, in return for your hospitality, let me warn you to be brief. I have now been entertained in this house for twenty-four hours. I am not complaining, but my friends and the friends of Mr. Carroll may be getting anxious. They may even have come to the conclusion that we are being — shall we say — detained. We do not always see eye to eye, Mr. Caramac, but we have one thing in common, namely a prejudice against untimely interference from the police."

"Straight to the point as usual, Colonel Granby.

But let me assure you that my own dislike of police interference has on the whole increased rather than diminished during the last few years."

The thin fingers on the rug contracted and the frail form in the chair was for a moment rigid.

"I shall be quite frank with you," he continued. "I should not be at all disposed to welcome a visit from the authorities. But we will leave aside that consideration for the moment. I must first be satisfied on one or two small but essential matters."

"For instance," said Granby.

"First," continued Caramac, "why did you come to the château yesterday and what were you doing in the dovecote?"

"Alas," said Granby.

Caramac nodded and there came a frosty gleam into his cold eyes.

"I understand," he said. "I have had an interesting conversation with Marie on the subject. She found, it seems the heel of Achilles."

"*Mea culpa*," murmured Granby.

"That however is a side issue," Caramac continued, "and I will spare your blushes. You did not come to the château to see Marie. You came as the result of a message which Robert Seguin failed to deliver."

"I came to ascertain, if possible, why Robert Seguin died."

"Or as the result of information which you had received either from him or in some other way?"

"I have no information," said Granby promptly. "I was to meet Seguin yesterday. I haven't a notion of what he wanted to say. All I know is that he died un-

timely and that you were his physician. I may add that, until yesterday, I had no idea that you were within miles of the Pont du Gard. I did not even know you had been released."

Caramac nodded.

"That is possible," he said. "I did not know myself that you were in these parts till the evening before yesterday. I had the first news of your presence here from our mutual friend Monsieur Richards."

Granby stared at him and there was a gleam of admiration in his eyes.

"The evening before yesterday," he repeated. "I congratulate you, Doctor. You did not lose much time."

Caramac smiled.

"You are referring, I think, to the incident of the arrow — a purely instinctive gesture, my dear Colonel, and I am almost glad it miscarried. Otherwise, I should not now have the pleasure of receiving you here. But I will now listen to what you have to say."

"I have nothing to say," said Granby promptly.

Caramac nodded again.

"You would, of course, say that," he replied. "You know nothing. Therefore, you may be quite safely released."

"You will release me in your own interests. The police . . ."

"Tactless, my dear Colonel, tactless. Why this continued reference to the police? The question for me is whether you know or do not know anything of my present plans. Your story is not very probable on the face of it. You have been in correspondence with Seguin. You called upon him yesterday. You sent your

friend for a message which Seguin had addressed to you on the point of death. You came straight from his house to the château. Meanwhile Mr. Carroll collected your correspondence at Avignon and, hearing on his return that you had gone to the château, he set out almost immediately to visit you. You must have had some definite object in coming here. I do not believe that there was no method in all this madness."

"Madness," I echoed.

Caramac turned upon me with a swift, snakelike motion of the head.

"Madness," he repeated. "Do you forget who I am and what my life has been for the last two years? Either you have forgotten, or you would not have put yourselves into my power for five minutes — unless there was some very strong reason for it."

"But my dear Doctor," said Granby lightly, "you know my disposition. I am one of these meddlesome fellows, and I did rather want to know why you should have taken so keen an interest in the last unfortunate illness of my friend the miller."

"And Mr. Carroll?" said Caramac. "Is his interest also . . . clinical?"

Granby nodded at me encouragingly.

"I came to tell Colonel Granby what happened this afternoon at Doctor Peyrolles' dispensary," I said.

Caramac gave a low, pleasant laugh, almost like a woman's. It surprised me coming from so old a man.

"I am referring to the jars," I blundered on, "the jars that were stolen in order to remove the evidence that Seguin had been poisoned."

"Of course," said Caramac, "the jars."

"It was careless of you to steal the jars," I went on, goaded by his air of amusement. "Their disappearance looks rather bad. We suspected foul play. You have stolen the evidence and you are detaining us here by force. The police . . ."

Caramac held up a slim hand.

"Again the police," he protested. "I hope your friends have not been so ill-advised as to call at the station. And I trust that for their own sakes they made no references to the jars. It is difficult to inspire confidence in the local police, and, once they begin to distrust you . . ."

He broke off and looked at me with that curiously superficial smile, like a thin veil drawn across the naked passion of his hatred.

"Why should the police distrust our friends?" I stammered.

"Only if they refer to the jars," said Caramac softly. "The police, you see, may decide to look into the matter. They may even visit the dispensary of Doctor Peyrolles. They will in that case infer that some one has been organizing a practical joke at their expense, and the official mind, I need hardly remind you, is apt to be sensitive, to stand upon its dignity."

There was a low chuckle from Granby.

"By Jove, Doctor," he said, "I take your meaning.

"Smart work, Geoffrey, and no mistake," he added, turning to me.

I stared at him stupidly.

"Don't you see," Granby went on. "The police, if they go to the dispensary, will be convinced that we are all mad as hatters."

"But why?" I asked.

"They will find the jars," said Granby.

I looked from Granby to Caramac.

"Yes," said Caramac. "I have returned the jars and everything, I think, will be found in order. Any trace, for example, of a substance which might have supported the curious view that our friend the miller did not die a natural death, has, of course, been removed. It was a nice little problem in chemistry, but fortunately the substance used was extremely volatile — *anima, blandula, vagula,* as the poet said of his, I fear, purely hypothetical soul."

Granby might chuckle, but it was from the lips only. Diana and David must have gone to the police; but the police had not appeared.

"Well," he commented at last, "it's one up to you, Doctor."

Caramac bowed.

"You have met the count, I think," he observed, as it seemed, rather irrelevantly.

"I have met the count," Granby admitted.

"A man of enormous wealth," continued Caramac lightly, "and money, as they say, talks. He has, you will easily understand, considerable local influence."

Granby nodded.

"I see," he said, "you mean that the police are in his pocket?"

"I did not mention the police," said Caramac, with a gesture of depreciation. "It is you who insist on doing that. I would much prefer to discuss other and more important matters."

"Tell me one of them," said Granby.

"Mr. Carroll handed my friend Richards a blank postcard this afternoon. There was also a letter but it was not of much importance. I am sorry your tailor is pressing you, Colonel Granby, but you will doubtless be able to satisfy him by ordering some more clothes. That, I believe is the classical way of dealing with these crises. The postcard, however, was important. I wish to know what was written upon it when Mr. Carroll received it from the hotel."

"There was nothing on the postcard," I said.

"Curious," murmured Caramac.

"Why should it be curious?" Granby asked. "Why shouldn't a friend send me a picture postcard without troubling to write upon it?"

"No reason at all," Caramac softly agreed. "But Marie identified the writing of the address as that of her father, and it strikes me as curious that a dying man should send you so urgently a photograph of our local monument."

He paused for a moment and looked at us both, then he leaned forward suddenly, gripping the edge of the desk with the tips of his long fingers.

"There was a message on the postcard," he said quietly, "and I mean to know what it was. I submitted it to a number of chemical tests. They revealed some kind of ink upon the blank surface. Unfortunately the traces were too faint to enable the writing to be read, but I cannot help wondering, Mr. Carroll"— and here he turned sharply to me — "if the card was as blank as it is now when you picked it up in Avignon?"

"Quite blank," I said, staring at him as steadily as I could.

Again the thin fingers on the rug tightened.

"I do not believe you, Mr. Carroll," he said. "Would Seguin send an important message, so important that it must be written in sympathetic ink, if he had thought the message would disappear before the person for whom it was intended could read it? I know Colonel Granby has not read the postcard, for he has not even seen it, but I feel sure that you have read it, Mr. Carroll, and I must ask you to be good enough to deliver the message to me here and now."

"I have nothing to say, Monsieur Caramac," I answered. "The postcard was blank, and, as far as I am concerned, has always been so."

"We searched you when you were asleep," continued Caramac, "and found no memorandum of the message. That would seem, of course, to confirm your statement, but I am sorry to say, I do not believe you. You came to the château to see Colonel Granby. What conceivable purpose could you have had but to tell him what was written on the postcard?"

"You are quite wrong," I said, in a glow of righteousness that I should now be telling the truth. "I came here to tell Colonel Granby about the jars and to ascertain whether he was safe and sound. Naturally I was anxious."

"Very naturally, Mr. Carroll, very naturally indeed," he replied. "But I don't believe that the postcard was a blank and I intend to know exactly how far Seguin had gone in his most indiscreet revelation of certain plans in which I am interested. So I will beg

you to recover your memory. The message was brief — in fact it rather puzzles me to guess what Seguin could possibly have said in so short a compass and I am driven to assume that he was rather indicating where a more important message might be found than imparting any really serious information. It would reassure me to know that this was the case, especially as I should then be able to remove any such information from the inquisitive perquisitions of Colonel Granby. It is for you to decide whether you think it worth while to set my mind at rest. Meanwhile, it may, perhaps, assist your memory, Mr. Carroll, if I remind you that your wife and friend had an engagement this morning to lunch with my friend and host the Count de Vallantré."

I jumped from my chair.

"Granby," I said, and I found my voice suddenly out of control, "Diana is here. Do you understand?"

"Steady, Geoffrey," he said, and his tone checked me like a reprimand.

"Exactly," came the voice of Caramac. "It is always well to face things quietly. You have before you an excellent example in Colonel Granby. But perhaps it is easier for him. The position comes less nearly home."

"What have you done with Diana?" I said, glaring senselessly at the quiet figure on the chair.

"Mrs. Carroll is for the moment our guest," he answered smoothly.

For one brief instant I had a mind to lift him from his seat and crush the life out of him with my shaking hands, but I could see that his foot was ready to give the signal for my prompt arrest.

"Where is my wife?" I repeated.

"Mrs. Carroll kept her appointment," Caramac replied. "The count, I need hardly say, was charmed. I have never seen him in better form — quite ten years younger, in fact; and, should it be necessary for your wife to remain with us until I am more fully informed upon the points I have mentioned, you may rely upon him to do with pleasure the honours of this somewhat peculiar establishment."

I must have been feeling pretty bad at that moment.

The room was beginning to be rather vague and I remember feeling Granby's grip upon my arm, though I had not seen him leave his chair.

"Come, Geoffrey," he said.

I found that I was holding on tight to his shoulder. I also perceived that Archimedes had entered the room and that Caramac, as it seemed, at a great distance, was leaning forward in his chair.

"For the last time, Mr. Carroll, will you tell me what was written upon the postcard?"

I put my hand to my head, which was spinning.

"Nothing," I said vaguely. "Didn't I tell you? There was nothing at all."

Caramac gently shook his head.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Carroll. But Archimedes shall take you back to the dovecote. I will give you till to-morrow morning to recover your memory."

He turned as he spoke and took one of the illuminated books from the table.

"Till to-morrow," he added softly, as we made to follow Archimedes from the room.

CHAPTER VII

I ASSUME THE WINGS OF A DOVE

"Geoffrey, old boy, I wish to goodness you'd sit down."

It was Granby speaking. We were back in the dovecote, and I was padding round the circular room like an animal in the zoo.

I dropped heavily to the divan but instantly got up again. It was no use. I could not keep still.

"Look here, Geoffrey," said Granby after a moment, coming towards me and putting a hand on my shoulder, "it's not a bit of good behaving like this. You aren't going to help Diana or anybody else by running about like a squirrel after nuts."

"Then for God's sake give me something to do," I urged.

I began again to pace the room. What was the use of trying to keep calm, with the thought of Diana to plague me and the vision of those dancing girls, with the tired lecher in his gorgeous clothes, his cynical smile and his hot eyes.

I leaned against the wall and in sudden rage beat upon it with my fists. Then I saw that Granby had risen and was coming towards me. More of his cold comfort, I supposed. But I was mistaken.

"Do that again," he said.

I stared at him in panic. Was he, also, going mad? He lifted his fist and struck the wall once again. I noted then that it sounded hollow beneath his blows. That sobered me. Without a word we began to examine the wall carefully. Part of the room was panelled, though in places the panelling had fallen away. Close to where we stood was a long crack.

"Granby," I said, "there is a door here or something like it."

"It's a door all right," he agreed, "and here is the keyhole."

He pointed with his finger to a small depression in the paint, and produced from his pocket a penknife. The keyhole was soon laid bare and he blew into it to free it from the last shreds of paint. Then he stood back and regarded his handiwork.

"Now, if we had a bit of wire, old boy," he said, "I would have that door open as easy as kiss your hand."

"Wire," I said, "you might as well ask for the key and have done with it."

I broke off suddenly.

"By Jove, Granby, the place must be full of wire," I exclaimed, pointing to the divan.

"Well done, Geoffrey," he replied and, opening his knife again, slit up the faded material of the divan and in a few minutes triumphantly displayed a twisted wire spring.

"Good Ferminy steel, this," he said, as we straightened it out.

Now that I had something to do I was feeling better and began to feel a bit ashamed of myself. I even started to apologise, but Granby cut me short.

"Wrap it the wrong way round your foot, laddie," he said.

I tried to do so; but that wire spring was the devil. It slipped and jumped about like a live thing. At last, however, we got it fairly straight, and then Granby with the file in his knife, cut off a suitable length and tackled the keyhole.

"Well," he said as he worked. "I hope it leads somewhere. Doors generally do."

There was a slight click as he spoke and he began pulling at the edge of the door. It was stiff and moved with difficulty, but we tore it back with eager hands and cried out simultaneously, as we found ourselves staring into a cupboard. Three or four albums, covered with dust, lay on the shelves. One of them, dislodged by our attack upon the door, slipped and fell with a clatter, scattering loose sheets about the room. I thrust my head into the cupboard and felt wildly round it, hoping against hope that there might be some way out, but my fingers encountered nothing but rough brick, and I turned with bitter disappointment to see Granby carefully collecting the sheets on the floor.

"What are they, anyway?" I asked. "Plans of the castle, secret way out?"

"They are some of the more unusual drawings of Felician Rops," he replied. "A very limited edition, I see, only fifty copies, and by George, I don't wonder!"

I looked over his shoulder and saw one of the designs. At the sight of it all my previous misery and panic came back upon me. Diana was in the hands of that man and here was a specimen of his art treasures.

"There is always the door of the room," said Granby.

He put the album back on the shelf of the cupboard as he spoke and closed it.

"What's the use?" I said. "There's still the outer door beyond this one and it has got bolts on the outside half an inch thick. I noticed them as we came through."

"That's no reason why we shouldn't try to enlarge our prison," said Granby cheerfully, as he began to examine the lock. "I'm pretty sure I can manage it," he continued after a pause, "but it will take rather longer than the cupboard and I think we had better wait."

"It's a hopeless job anyhow," I said.

"Nice cheerful chap you are!" Granby replied.

Granby did his best, but I was too far gone to respond to his efforts. I sat back on the divan. There it was — Diana in the toils, somewhere in this outrageous château; herded, perhaps, with Aspasia and the rest of them. I saw once more, with fatal clearness, the great ballroom with its shining floor, its lascivious frescoes and ceiling, the naked dancers, and the master of it all, lolling in his white satin, trying vainly to recover, if only for a moment, the ardour of youth.

The thought was so intolerable that I rose and advanced towards the door with uplifted hands.

To my surprise and discomfiture it opened suddenly.

Archimedes and four footmen stood upon the threshold. They bore in their hands dishes of silver gilt, and the last of them carried two cobwebbed bottles nestling in wicker baskets.

"Your dinner, sars," announced Archimedes.

The servants advanced, each in step and each bearing aloft at the full stretch of his ebony arms the viands sent us by the fantastic count.

I have little recollection of eating or drinking, though Granby did his best, urging that to dine was essential, otherwise, we were simply playing into the enemy's hands. There was, I remember, a blood-red soup with a white patch of cream in the midst of it and red mullet in greased paper that had been alive that morning in the Mediterranean. I thought of Carstairs. Was he also being entertained on the same scale? It's an ill wind that blows nobody any good. Granby insisted that the hock was incomparable and the Burgundy superb. Possibly he was right. He drank at last to our escape, and with death in my heart I lifted the great bellying glass containing the pale amber of a Courvoisier, 1812, setting it down with an hysterical catch of the breath.

"Granby," I said, "is it true that, before they hang a man, they allow him to choose his breakfast?"

He did not answer, for at that moment Archimedes entered with his troop to clear away the dishes.

"At what time, sars," he asked, "do your excellencies desire to be called to-morrow?"

Granby looked at me.

"Half-past eight, shall we say? No, nine o'clock, perhaps, would be more suitable."

"Very good, sar. Tea, coffee, chocolate or brandy and soda?"

"Tea," replied Granby.

"Orange pekoe, Suching, Ceylon or Formosa?"

"Orange pekoe," replied Granby.

"With milk, sar?"

Granby nodded.

"Jersey, Guernsey, Alderney . . ."

"Sark," said Granby promptly, whereupon the Negro withdrew. Just before he shut the door, however, he gestured towards the divan.

"The count say he very sorry, sars, but he ask you to put up with the inconvenience of the divan for to-night. To-morrow perhaps other arrangements will be made. But no beds."

He shut the door as he spoke before we could reply, and we were once more alone.

"What did he mean by that?" I asked.

Granby smiled.

"They are taking no chances," he answered. "A comfortable divan, Geoffrey, but no sheets and no blankets. For why? So that we may not be tempted to tear them up and make a rope."

"But hang it all," I protested. "There isn't a window in the room, so a rope would not be of any use, even if we could make one."

"That's where you are wrong," replied Granby. "I intend, as I said before dinner, to get this door open, and a rope would then come in very useful."

I shook my head.

"Granby," I said, "I'm sick of this. What's the use of pretending you can get out? We are shut up here for keeps, and, when Caramac is tired of playing with us, we shall go the way of all flesh and you know it."

Granby gripped me on the shoulder.

"As a friend of Job," he said, "you wouldn't even be allowed to compete. Now look here, Geoffrey, you

have got to pull yourself together. I'm going to have this door open in half an hour. Then we are going to explore and if we can't find a way out of this dovecote somehow or other, I'm a Dutchman. We're badly down at the turn, my lad, but we have still got nine holes to play and we are going to get away with it."

He had picked up the piece of wire which we had taken from the spring of the divan and was already at work upon the door.

I did not pay much attention to him, but sat listlessly on the far side of the circular room, turning over the drawings which had fallen from the cupboard.

A click from the door brought me to my feet. Granby, a finger to his lips, swung it open. I crossed the room.

"A bit of a job," said Granby in a low tone, "but I have managed it. Now, you stay here, my lad. Hold the door shut and listen."

With an effort I threw off my depression and did as I was bid. Granby, having slipped off his shoes, passed through the door, and moved like a shadow down the spiral staircase. I stood listening, but all I could hear was the wind howling outside and an occasional tapping as that of the branches of a tree knocking together. That was all, though I strained my ears. But in those moments of silent listening I came to myself again. Granby was right; it was useless to curse fate and think continuously of what might happen to Diana. Action was the only cure.

There was a slight pressure on the door. I pulled it back. Granby had returned.

"All is well," he said in his ordinary tone. "There

is no one on guard, but, as you said, the outer door is impossible. It's bolted on the outside and I can't touch it. There remains the roof."

"That is a useful thought," I said. "All we have to do now is to grow wings."

He took me by the arm.

"Come along, young fellow-my-lad," he said. "Don't stay here moping but come with me."

He moved again to the staircase and I followed him obediently. We climbed in silence, except that I could hear Granby counting softly just above his breath.

"One hundred and twenty-two," he said at last and paused. It was pitch dark where we were standing, and I could see nothing. Then from above my head came a faint knocking. Granby was testing the ceiling.

"There is some sort of trapdoor here," he whispered. "I can just feel the catch. Let me get on to your shoulders, Geoffrey, and have a dekko."

"All right," I answered, bracing myself against the wall as he spoke.

He climbed on my back and a moment later I felt the soles of his feet on my shoulders.

"Stand firm, Geoffrey," he called softly down to me, as the splutter of a match came to my ears.

The light showed that we were at the top of the staircase, which ended in a very small landing, about eight feet square. The match died and darkness descended. There came a grunt from above my head and the pressure on my shoulders increased. Then a squeal as of unwilling hinges, obliged at long last to perform their office.

"Good!" said Granby from above. "Stand back, Geoffrey, I am coming down."

I heard a light step beside me a second later. "I have got the trapdoor opened," he said.

"Where does it lead to?" I asked.

"That," he replied, "has yet to be seen. I will take a breather and then go up again."

Presently he got on my shoulders again and with a light spring disappeared into the darkness above. Soon I was aware of a cold draught of air blowing on my head and shoulders. A faint light was showing. Granby's voice came down, hollow and remote.

"This is a lumber room, old boy," it said. "And there is likewise a little platform on the top of the tower, with several things of interest. Go back to the room and get candles — also our shoes."

I started off again down the staircase. I have forgotten to say that there was no electric light, but they had left us plenty of candles in two silver candlesticks, each with six branches. These I secured, together with our shoes, and climbed once more the spiral staircase. I handed them up to Granby, who, putting them out of the way of the draught, lit the candles and then called me up to join him. I could see his face, white and strained in the black aperture of the trapdoor above my head. A lean arm came down. I grasped the hand at the end of it, and was drawn to the level of the trapdoor. I kicked out, got a purchase with an elbow, and drew myself on to the floor beside Granby.

"By gad," I said, "you must be pretty strong!"

He chuckled.

"Still pretty tough, Geoffrey," he said. "But look at our treasure."

He waved his hand at a quantity of tumbled, dusty stuff with faded stripes, red and white, painted upon it.

I had begun to look about me and perceived that I was in a low loft in which it was barely possible to stand upright. Immediately above my head was a glass skylight. The stuff on the floor at which Granby was pointing, was part of a tent or tents — the roof, perhaps, of a summer pavilion long since forgotten and stowed away in the turret loft.

I stared at it blankly.

He began tugging at the canvas as he spoke and soon had it spread out all over the floor of the little turret room.

"How many steps from where we were imprisoned?" he asked.

"One hundred and twenty-two," I said. "I heard you counting them."

He nodded.

"One hundred and twenty-two, and we were on the first floor. Add thirty. That makes one hundred and fifty-two, and each step is six inches high. That's seventy-one feet. Then we have got the height of this room and the height of the landing to account for — say another twelve feet. That gives us eighty-three feet."

He went over to the canvas and pulling one end towards him held it out to me.

I perceived then that attached to one end of the canvas were the ropes or cords by which the tent had been secured to the ground.

My heart gave a great bound. For the first time escape seemed possible.

"Ropes," I said eagerly.

Granby picked up a couple of ends and examined them.

"No good, I am afraid," he said. "These cords wouldn't support a man while he was climbing down all that eighty-three feet of tower. The canvas on the other hand is good enough. We shall have to cut it into strips. It will be a pretty tedious job with one knife between us."

He pulled the canvas edge towards him and began to run his arm along it from the tips of his fingers to the elbow. When he had come to the end, he appeared satisfied.

"There is enough of it and to spare," he said at last. "The only thing that worries me is the time it will take. This canvas is very thick stuff and will take a lot of cutting. I think we will halve it, to begin with."

I helped him to spread the canvas. It was in a single sheet, much larger than the room in which we stood. We folded this in two, and then began the task of cutting it in half. Granby's knife, though fairly serviceable, was not very sharp. It took us one hour and a half to cut that piece of canvas into two pieces, and that was the easiest part of our job.

We were taking the knife turn and turn about. Granby handed it to me and looked at his watch.

"Do you realise, Geoffrey," he asked, "that Archimedes will be upon us with the morning tea in less than eight hours?"

I made a savage hack at the canvas and there was a

light snap. The knife had broken. Only about a quarter of an inch of blade remained.

"That's torn it," said Granby, "or perhaps I should say that it hasn't."

I worked on for a moment desperately and soon realized that our rate of progress had been reduced by at least fifty per cent.

I felt a hand on my arm.

"No use, Geoffrey," Granby said. "We can't possibly finish that rope by daylight or even by midday tomorrow."

"Sorry," I muttered.

The word was inadequate, but I could say no more.

Granby was looking thoughtfully at the two huge sheets of canvas on the floor. Then his eye wandered to the mass of cordage that made an untidy fringe about the edges.

His hand on my arm tightened.

"I think I've got it, Geoffrey," he said. "It's pretty windy outside."

I stared at him.

"Yes," I said, "it's blowing up for a strong *mistral*."

"Parachutes," he said.

I had been looking hopeless. I now looked merely bewildered.

"Parachutes," repeated Granby, "the ropes are strong enough for that. Eight ropes apiece and each takes one eighth of the strain. The canvas is practically ready. It should take us about five hours. Ninety feet to the ground. It's short commons but it's blowing great guns and the *mistral* will help us a lot."

"I don't quite understand," I faltered. "Do you

mean that we are going to jump from the roof?"

"Or be carried away," said Granby. "There are two ways of using a parachute. The old hands drop into space and pull the string. But that takes a bit of nerve — more than I've got, anyway. The other method is to creep out onto the wings of the plane, and in that case your parachute fills with the rush of air and you are swept off into the void. That is the way for beginners like you and me. And in this case the *mistral* will take the place of the speed of the aëroplane."

Already he was on his feet, laying out the tangled mass of cordage which we had previously neglected, and suddenly I was infected with his energy. Here at least was something to do, and I dreaded above everything to sit idle.

The next few hours certainly gave neither of us any leisure. Our main difficulty was that many of the ropes were rotten with age and damp and out of the tangled mass we only succeeded in finding ten out of the sixteen lengths required for our purpose. The other ropes we had to make ourselves from odd strips of canvas. This with the blunt edge of the broken knife seemed an endless business. It was five in the morning and dawn was near before we were ready. The first warning we had of its approach was a stirring and rustling beneath our feet. I wondered at first what it was. Then I remembered the pigeons. We had been underneath their roosting place in the room below. Here we were above them.

"There," said Granby at last, as he tightened the last knot. "Not a bad bit of work. And now for the great aërial act."

He thrust back the skylight as he spoke. With a

spring he caught hold of the edge and pulled himself up, so that he now stood on the top of the dovecote. His first care was to pull the parachutes one by one through the skylight. Then he gave me a hand up so that we both stood on the platform together, with nothing but a low parapet reaching hardly to our knees between ourselves and the empty air. The wind was blowing furiously, a real *mistral*, tearing at our clothes and bodies, so that I was reminded of the day when I had first climbed the great tower of the Palace of the Popes at Avignon in just such another blast, which had nearly swept me into the square below.

Cautiously Granby examined the ground surrounding the dovecote.

"Well," he said, when he had finished, "there is not much to choose. All we can do in this wind is to land over there to the south, and as far as I can see there is nothing for us to alight upon but bushes and scrub."

I had worked at the parachutes without any real thought of the use to which they would be put. I realised it now. We were to jump into space in that awful gale. The parachutes were homemade. I knew nothing of the stresses they would have to bear or of the amount of drop necessary for their efficient action. It suddenly seemed hardly good enough. It looked indeed very like certain death. We should surely break our necks. The ropes must give way, or the canvas rip, or the whole contraption fail to act at all.

Granby was watching me anxiously.

"Yes," he said. "But it looks a good deal worse than it is. I've done it myself, so I know — when I was dropped behind the Bulgar lines at Salonica."

"What is the drill?" I asked.

I smiled feebly, but my teeth were chattering.

"It's quite simple," said Granby soothingly, "and at this job one man's as good as another."

He led me to the northern edge of the dovecote, and helped to fasten me to the parachute, securing the ropes under my arms and about my waist.

"Listen," he said, raising his voice above the roaring wind. "Let the *mistral* blow your parachute out like a sail, then, when you begin to feel it pulling, run across the platform and jump. You will be perfectly all right. I reckon you have got one third more canvas than is necessary to support a human body."

"Are you good at figures, Granby?" I asked.

"First-class," he answered. "Now then. Are you ready, Geoffrey?"

"As ready as I ever shall be," I answered, and I suddenly realised it was now or never. Either I must run at once or, if I thought any more about it, I should never do it at all.

I stood with my back to the wind. Granby was in front of me. Picking up a fold of the canvas, he held it aloft so that the wind caught it. I began to feel the strain of the ropes. Then, abruptly, they caught and lifted me. The world was a mass of red and white canvas, clapping and roaring in my ears.

"Let go, old boy," shouted Granby.

I did not need to run. The great sheet bellied out like a sail and swept me off my feet, which danced lightly on tiptoe, over the short brick floor of the platform. I weighed nothing at all and found myself leaping in giant strides.

A sharp blow on my ankle caused me a moment's agonising pain. I had hit the parapet on the far end.

But now I was over, flying wildly through the air. The whole contraption heeled sideways as I began to fall, so that I was twisted round. The red brick of the dovecote streamed past me, upwards. A succession of tiny holes, like perforations on a strip of film, marked the niches for the pigeons. I thought suddenly of Alice falling down the well and half expected to see the famous jar, labelled marmalade, upon the shelf. Then I was whirled round again.

There came a crackling sound, followed by a sharp jolt in the ribs. I was lying spread-eagled on the boughs of a wild ilex, one of ten thousand composing the undergrowth surrounding the castle. The boughs cracked and broke beneath my weight. I was all mixed up in a confusion of flapping canvas. A branch seared my cheek like a red-hot iron. I gasped and floundered.

There was a swift jerk under my arms and I found myself hanging a foot or two from the ground, swinging stupidly like a scarecrow.

"It's all over. I've arrived," I thought.

Then a heavy boot caught me a glancing blow in the mouth. There was a crash and wild arms gripped me by the neck. Granby's face, purple and distorted, flashed past my own. There was a tearing, rending sound and we fell together.

An instant later we were lying bewildered, side by by side, in a thicket of rosemary, its fragrance filling the raw air about us.

CHAPTER VIII

I HEAR OF THE FOURTEENTH STAIR

"Granby," I said, as I struggled to my knees, "are you still alive?"

"And kicking," replied Granby, vigorously starting to disentangle himself from strips of canvas and broken branches.

I found that my braces had been wrenched from my shoulders and were hanging about my waist. Granby slipped them back into position.

"A man," he said, "cannot run away and hold up his trousers. It's an old war-time trick, laddie. Remove the buttons and your prisoner is safe. We found it very useful on the Somme, and I expect the Germans did too. Any damage?"

"I was wondering when you were going to ask me that," I said bitterly. "Nothing much. Just a good hearty kick on the mouth from a friend."

"Good," said Granby, and, motioning me to follow him, he began to move forward through the undergrowth down the hill in the direction of the hotel.

It was the moment just before the dawn. Everything was black and grey, no colour anywhere; and we moved like two sinister figures in an old wood cut by Dürer. The shrubs stood about us dwarflike and stretched shadowy fingers to snatch at us as we rustled our way

through. I was still trembling from the reaction of our sudden escape.

"Why not take the path?" I presently enquired.

"The path is more likely to be watched than the scrub," replied Granby. "Stick to it, Geoffrey. We shall soon be able to take some useful steps."

The sun, as he spoke, looked along at us far away to our right, and abruptly the macabre wood took on the happy colour of day. A moment ago we had been spectres in a waste of shadows; but now, all at once, the birds were singing; and amid a rustle and gleam of leaves, the light was dancing and two plain men rather red in the face, painfully scratched and decidedly hungry, moved sweating through scented undergrowth to freedom.

We had walked, I suppose, for about half an hour, when Granby, who was leading, stopped abruptly.

"Do you see where we are?" he asked in a low tone.

I straightened myself and looked first ahead and then to the left. We had returned to the path.

"Yes," I answered, "we are near the remains of the aqueduct. I walked along this path two days ago with Diana and David."

Was it only two days ago? It seemed a lifetime away. And Diana and David, where were they now?

I moved on and we crossed the path as quickly as we could. Presently we found ourselves stumbling upon a little track with here and there a mass of yellow stone — all that was left of the great aqueduct, and in another moment we had reached the tunnel and so came out upon the bridge itself.

"Seven o'clock," said Granby, looking at his watch.

"Well," I asked, "what's the next move?"

"The police," said Granby promptly. "It's the only thing. They may not act. Caramac as good as told us that they had been squared. But we shall at least find out how the land lies."

We made our way slowly across the aqueduct till we stood in the road once more near the mill.

"What will you say to them?" I asked.

"It depends," said Granby. "And you had better leave the talking to me, young fellow. I suspect the ice is pretty thin. But first we will go to the hotel. It is always well to appear before the representatives of the law decently dressed, and we don't look exactly as though we had come out of a brace of bandboxes."

"We have no time to lose," I objected.

"Quite so," said Granby. "That's another good reason for going to the hotel. Your car is there, remember, and we can get to Remoulins much more quickly in the Rolls than on foot."

We crossed the Pont du Gard once more and walked down to the hotel. A maid was sweeping out the alfresco dining room and she gave a startled exclamation when she saw us.

"Quick," I said to her. "Where's the *patron?*"

"He has gone to market, Monsieur," she answered.

She stared at us with an interest that was not, in the circumstances, excessive. We were hatless; our clothes were torn; and my lip was swelling handsomely where Granby's boot had struck me. But I had no eyes for the maid.

"Granby," I said, looking towards the garage, "the car's gone."

Granby stared at the yawning mouth of the neolithic cave.

"Now I wonder what that means," he said.

He turned to the maid.

"The lady and gentleman who were staying here," he said, "where are they?"

The girl shook her head.

"They went away yesterday morning," she replied, "and have not yet returned."

"Breakfast," said Granby, "as quickly as you can manage it."

The maid abandoned her sweeping and went into the house.

"Come on, Geoffrey," said Granby, pulling me through the door and up the stone stairs. "A wash is indicated."

"I don't understand this," I protested. "Have they taken the car? Diana could hardly have driven to the château. There isn't a road."

"One thing at a time," said Granby wearily. "The car has vanished and for the present we can say no more. The next thing is to make ourselves respectable, and then we will go to Remoulins — on foot, I suppose."

I washed and changed my clothes. The room seemed just the same. Diana's things were hanging in the wardrobe, driving it home that she was no longer there. Nothing was changed except for one thing, which sent me down to breakfast with another riddle to read.

"Granby," I said, as we sat down to the coffee and rolls, "my despatch case has disappeared."

"So has mine," said Granby, "but the rest of my luggage is intact."

"Same here. It's queer."

"Everything is queer. Was there anything in your despatch case of value?" he asked.

"Nothing," I said bitterly, "except all my money, passport and personal papers."

"Is that all?" said Granby.

"What more do you want?" I asked.

"I want the key, to decipher those figures you are so obligingly carrying about in your head—in other words the message on the postcard; and that key is in *my* despatch case. However, it's no use worrying. We must just buzz off to Remoulins and have a word with the local inspector."

He pushed aside his plate as he spoke and stood up. There came the sound of a car as he did so and the innkeeper appeared round the bend of the road, driving his Citroën filled with vegetables and other produce. Granby went out to meet him. They had some conversation and then Granby beckoned to me. He was beside the driver when I came up, and, squeezing closer, made room for me on the seat.

"Monsieur," he said, "has kindly offered to run us into Remoulins."

"Does he know what has become of Diana and Carstairs?" I asked.

He shook his head.

"The man was away all yesterday on business, apparently in Avignon, with his wife. There was only that young maid in the house. None of them seems to know when exactly the Rolls went off, or whether it went off with or without Diana."

We drove gloomily into Remoulins, and were depos-

ited outside a large yellow building with a stucco portico covered with faded notices. This was the *mairie*.

With a wave of the hand Granby bade farewell to the innkeeper. We then climbed the dusty steps and a minute later found ourselves in the presence of the law. The *commissaire*, a little man with a black moustache and a dirty collar, was sitting at an ink-stained table. He eyed us nervously as we entered his squalid room — not as a man who had anything definite to fear but rather as a man who expected in the nature of things to be harassed.

We introduced ourselves. With a wave of the hand he motioned us to sit down in front of him.

"Well," he twittered, "is there anything I can do for you?"

He smiled. He was all affability and deprecation.

"Monsieur le Commissaire," replied Granby, "I am frankly in a difficulty. I am myself, you understand, connected with the English police, as you see from my papers."

The little man nodded and emitted a series of affirmative noises. He seemed anxious to show that on all occasions he was eager to be agreeable, to respond to any reasonable stimulus.

Granby had pushed over a card in a little talc holder. Monsieur le Commissaire examined it respectfully.

"You are a liaison officer of Scotland Yard," he said at last, handing it back. "But how interesting. I am indeed most honoured. An officer of the great English House of Detection."

"Perfectly," said Granby, "and in that capacity, Monsieur le Commissaire, I happened the day before

yesterday to arrive at the house of the miller, Robert Seguin, very shortly after he died."

Monsieur le Commissaire wriggled in his chair. Perhaps it was constitutional. Or perhaps he found Granby's direct manner a little overwhelming.

"Robert Seguin," continued Granby, leaning impressively forward, "had sent me a special message to the effect that he had an important communication to make. I thought it strange that he should have died so . . . unexpectedly. I thought it indeed so strange that I ventured, after some hesitation, to consult Doctor Peyrolles, who was, I understood, his usual medical attendant."

"Yes, indeed," said the *commissaire*, "Doctor Peyrolles, an excellent fellow, but a little fussy, perhaps, a little fussy."

"Doctor Peyrolles conducted a post mortem, and he reported the result of it to my friend here," continued Granby inexorably.

Monsieur le Commissaire smiled apprehensively. His eyelids fluttered. His expression was petulant and yet resigned. He had a kind of born-to-trouble-as-the-sparks-fly-upward look about him.

"One moment, gentlemen," he said, "I may as well tell you at once that this is not altogether news to me. Doctor Peyrolles came to me only yesterday — an excellent fellow, as I said, but fussy, a little fussy. He was worrying about certain jars . . . Stolen, he said . . . They contained organs . . . organs of the dead miller. Most unfortunate. I think Monsieur le Docteur rather exceeded his powers in removing them, though it's not for me to say. We sent a man down to make the neces-

sary investigations, however, and found that the doctor was mistaken. The jars were not, in fact, stolen, but stood upon the shelf where he had left them. In deference to the doctor who was, if I may say so, unduly insistent, we sent the jars to Nîmes for analysis. Should the results confirm his suspicions, we shall know how to act."

"You might have spared yourself the trouble," I began; but suddenly stopped, for Granby was pressing my knee beneath the table, and I realised at once that he was right. Caramac had removed all traces of his crime, but we should never get the police to believe that story.

Granby was nodding gravely at the *commissaire*.

"Excellent," he said, "we will of course await the result of the analysis. I should, however, be very grateful to you, Monsieur le Commissaire, if you could in the meantime give me any information concerning the Count de Vallantré."

The eyelids of the little policeman fluttered rapidly.

"But certainly, Monsieur," he replied, "though I confess I do not quite understand your question. The Count de Vallantré is a man of great wealth, an ex-Minister of the Interior, as Monsieur le Colonel probably knows."

Granby nodded.

"His family have inhabited the Château de Vallantré for generations. He is a man of great influence and highly respected."

"Just a little . . . eccentric, is he not?" said Granby.

"Exactly, exactly," said the *commissaire*. "You put

it admirably. But the count can afford to live as he pleases. Eccentric . . . but highly respected."

He paused and then added suddenly:

"You are not the first person, Monsieur, to inquire concerning the count."

He rose as he spoke and tripped across to a dusty safe that stood clamped to the wall. This he opened and, drawing a buff-coloured paper from one of its shelves, returned and sat once more at the table. He began to turn the pages at leisure, while we watched him with curiosity.

"Yes," he said. "It was but yesterday. There was a lady who came here with a strange tale . . . Madame Carroll . . ."

"My wife," I interjected.

The *commissaire* bowed.

"I felicitate Monsieur," he murmured. "There was also," he continued, "a gentleman, Monsieur Carstairs. Madame said that the count was detaining her husband and moreover talked also of the jars. I could not understand very well what they desired me to do."

I made to speak, but felt Granby's hand on my knee.

"When did this happen?" he asked.

"Yesterday about nine o'clock in the morning," replied the *commissaire*. "Neither Madame nor Monsieur — you will forgive me —" — this with a deferential jerk at me — "was very lucid. Madame could only say that her husband had gone to the château. Monsieur seemed to desire that I should arrest the count. It was all most embarrassing, especially as Monsieur became impatient and I doubt whether he was always very po-

lite, though I do not sufficiently understand the English to know all that he was saying to Madame. Happily, however, the crisis did not endure, for, as I was trying to comfort Madame — who could be indifferent to the distress of so charming a lady — there came a telephone message from the count himself saying that you, Monsieur, were staying with him at the château and that owing to the strong *mistral* of last night, the telephone at the hotel being out of order, he had been unable to communicate with Madame directly. The count asked us, as Madame might perhaps be anxious, to telephone to her at the Pont du Gard to reassure her. He asked us also to say that Madame with her friend was expected to lunch that morning at the château. I gave her at once this so considerate communication, but it did not seem to have the effect desired. She departed, but did not seem less anxious than before; and, as for her friend, I regret to say that his manner was not of the most amicable."

He paused.

"That is all, gentlemen," he ended and rose from the table.

Granby sat silent for a moment. I knew what he was thinking. We could expect nothing from the local police. Did the *commissaire* believe in that message from the château? It was impossible to say. But it was clear that he would never take any action against the count, the ex-Minister of the Interior except on very clear evidence of its necessity. And we had no evidence. The poor little man would never do anything but respond to stimulus; and when it came to stimulus the count would prod the harder every time.

But Granby was speaking.

"Thank you, Monsieur le Commissaire," he was saying. "I am desolated to have deranged you to this extent. All my excuses."

"It is nothing," twittered the little man. "I am here for that sad purpose."

He smiled wanly and held out a nervous hand.

Granby rose and I suddenly realised that in another minute we should have left the room without having accomplished anything. It was too much.

"But look here," I protested, "this is impossible . . . There is something wrong, Monsieur le Commissaire, indeed, there is."

Granby put a hand on my arm, but I shook him off and turned fiercely upon the *commissaire*.

"My wife and Mr. Carstairs did not return to the inn last night. They are not there this morning. The telephone message from the château was not . . ."

But the *commissaire* was not listening. He had winced before my sudden attack; but now, all at once, he was smiling . . . smiling over my shoulder at some one or something in the room behind me.

I faced about and stared incredulously.

Diana and Carstairs were standing in the doorway.

For the moment none of us moved. Then I leaned forward, feeling strangely weak at the knees. The reaction had hit me hard. I was trembling in every limb.

There came a discreet little cough from the *commissaire*.

"As all parties to the case seem to have found each other," he began.

"Quite so, Monsieur le Commissaire," said Granby. "The incident, as they say, is closed."

His voice trailed off into a murmur. He was still speaking, but I had no ears for what he said. There was Diana, safe and sound. I found myself standing beside her, holding her fast by the wrist above the leather of her driving gloves.

"Thank God," I murmured, and again: "Thank God."

A moment later — I scarcely know how it was — we found ourselves in the road outside. There, before me, stood the Rolls, gleaming dustily in the morning sunlight. With one accord, Granby leading the way, we crossed the road towards the terrace of a café opposite the *mairie* and demanded drinks.

"Now, Diana," I urged as she sat down, "tell me everything. How did you escape? Why did they let you go? Are you all right? What happened at the château? Did that blackguard . . ."

I became aware of Granby, who had been striding up and down between the tables, standing beside us.

"Geoffrey," he interrupted, "we've been had for mugs."

I stared at him in bewilderment.

"What do you mean?" I stammered.

"They were never at the château at all. All your agonies were in vain. Caramac bluffed us into believing that he had got Diana. We simply lapped it up. It was magnificent. We never even dreamed of calling for his cards."

He turned swiftly to Carstairs.

"Well," he said, "you haven't been to the château. I

infer that with more than my usual wisdom after the event. It now only remains to tell us where you have been."

Carstairs, with frequent interpolations from Diana, filled in the gaps for us over a glass of vermouth on the terrace of the little café. They had decided, after their unsuccessful meeting with the *commissaire*, that it would be madness to go up to the château for lunch, and after a hasty discussion, had determined that their only hope was to find, somewhere and somehow, a British consul who had a pull with the French authorities and incidently some knowledge of Granby and his mission. They had accordingly set out in the car for Nîmes. To avoid exciting any suspicion or alarm they had left all our luggage at the hotel, as though they had been going for a drive, taking only the two despatch cases in which Granby and I kept our money and papers. They had drawn a blank in Nîmes. The British consul was a Frenchman who had never heard of Granby.

"He seemed to deal mostly with commercial travellers," Diana explained. "It's a pity Toby does not happen to be a bagman. Had he been travelling in never-blunt pencils . . ."

"Or Langton underwear, or rustless hairpins," put in Carstairs, "we might have been able to do something. As it happened he took us for a brace of lunatics."

"What next?" Granby asked.

"We went on to Marseilles. That was another blank. The consul was away — not expected back till evening. In his place we found an idiot with a face like a file and all wound about with red tape. I hope he isn't a friend of yours."

"Muddicombe," said Granby. "I know what he would do."

"He did," said Carstairs. "He said he had no idea that you were busy in these parts and that he had no powers to act. If we were in any trouble, it was a matter for the local police. Or perhaps we would prefer to wait till his chief returned."

"And so forth," said Granby. "Muddicombe is what they call a good official. He spends most of his time explaining that he is not responsible and we never tell him anything. The consul is another pair of shoes, name of Bosanquet, and a pretty useful fellow. Pity he was out. The useful chaps usually are."

"By that time," continued Carstairs, "we were beginning to get worried about what was happening here. So we left a note for the consul, warning him that we should be trying to get into touch with him on his return and shook the dust of the city — or some of it — off our mudguards."

"Where did you spend the night?" I asked.

"In the car," replied Carstairs. "Hobson's choice, it was. Late in the evening we ran out of petrol in a region somewhere near the *étang de Berre*, where cars are still unknown, and I spent most of the night trying to get some. I succeeded at last and here we are."

"Is that all?" I asked.

"Yes," said Diana.

"No," said Carstairs simultaneously.

I looked at them both and waited.

"I think we have seen your millionaire," continued Carstairs. "Is he at all like Henry VIII? You remember Holbein — flabby cheeks, complete with

dewlaps, eyes of a pig and mouth like a letter box."

"That's the man," I said. "Where did you see him?"

"We ran into him as we left the police station," said Diana. "He had the impertinence to take off his hat to me."

"Smitten," said Carstairs. "That is the word. And with his head over his shoulder turned, he seemed to find his way without his eyes — till he hit the apple cart and then he woke up."

"And now it's your turn," said Diana, as the waiter poured out another round of vermouths. "What have you been doing? How did you get away from the château?"

"Appease their curiosity, Geoffrey," said Granby as he rose and walked to the car. "I'm going to find my despatch case and get busy on the miller's message. You haven't forgotten those figures, Geoffrey?"

I fished an old envelope from my pocket, wrote down the figures which I had seen on the historic postcard and handed it to Granby.

Then I turned to Diana and Carstairs and for the next ten minutes rapidly recounted what had happened to us during the last thirty-six hours. They found it hard to believe and so, indeed, did I, sitting in that prosaic little café with the sun shining and the hens pecking and scratching between the tables.

"He seems a bit of a boy," said Carstairs, "I mean this count of yours."

"You may lay to that, as John Silver would say. You should have seen those pictures we found in the dovecote. But no more dovecote for me. I don't see myself, or even Granby, who loves these small misadventures, returning there in a hurry."

"Don't you? But I do," broke in a voice from behind us.

We turned and there was Granby, standing between the chairs. His face was grave, but his eyes were dancing.

"One of life's little ironies," he said.

He tapped the back of an envelope on which he had been scribbling.

"You have deciphered the message?" I said.

He nodded.

"All the details regarding the League of Discontent in code DK," he read, "will be found beneath the fourteenth stair counting from the bottom in the . . ."

He paused and looked at us.

I had a sudden premonition.

"The dovecote," I said.

Granby nodded.

"The dovecote," he repeated.

CHAPTER IX

I FOLLOW MY LEADER

I don't know what was in the minds of the others, but I know well enough what I felt. I had the swift sinking inside which I used to get on being suddenly sent up to the headmaster for twice six — twice six always seemed much worse in anticipation than merely twelve. Go back to the dovecote again? Not much! That was my first thought.

Then I looked at Granby. He was checking off the figures on the envelope, to make quite certain, I suppose, that he had rightly decoded the message. Diana turned a little white. I felt for her hand under the table and gripped it.

It was Carstairs who rose to the occasion.

"Well," he said slowly, "it looks as though I might get that lunch after all."

He glanced at his watch.

"Past ten already," he murmured. "No time to announce my impending visit. But potluck at the château will probably not be so dusty."

"The count does not lunch in the dovecote," said Granby. "More probably in the octagon room or the amethyst parlour."

"And what will the maids be wearing?" wondered Carstairs.

"I think it time we changed the conversation," said Diana. "What will Toby do?"

Granby looked at her and smiled.

"There is nothing else for it," he said. "It's going to be a bit of a business; but it's me, it's me, it's me, O Lord, as they sing in the spirituals."

"Negroes," I muttered.

"Look here, let me go," said Carstairs. "Why not let me go?"

Granby shook his head.

"Very good of you," he answered, "but this is my job. You don't know the ground and you wouldn't stand an earthly. I, on the other hand, am used to being quiet and invisible, and I don't mind telling you there ain't no flies on the Count de Vallantré or on little Jean Caramac either, despite his bath chair and his daily dose of pick-me-up."

We sat for a moment round the iron table in the bright Provençal sunshine, quietly facing the position, like a group waiting to be photographed.

Carstairs was the first to move.

"Why shouldn't I go up to the château?" he grumbled. "I might dress up as a bird fancier or something and blow in with a cage of pigeons. Papageno . . . music by Mozart and all that sort of thing."

But nobody paid any attention to Carstairs, for Granby, who had been thinking hard, was active again.

"The first thing," he said, "is to clear out of the hotel of the Pont du Gard. There is no reason to remain too closely under the enemy observation. Carstairs and Diana can go back and get the luggage, pay the bill

and tell the people we are leaving — going on to Nîmes and then to Aiguesmortes, continuing, in fact, our holiday. Then let them come back here. Meanwhile, Geoffrey and I will establish another base. A few words, I think, with the widowed Madame Seguin will do the trick. A hint, I fancy, to Rose will be all that is needed. We will go to ground in the mill and impress it upon Rose that we are not at home to visitors."

"Who is Rose?" asked Diana.

"The miller's elder daughter," replied Granby. "She dislikes the people at the château and especially her sister Marie, who is one of them. Marie has brought disgrace upon the family. 'They drink the champagne wine she sends them, but they never say her name.' Geoffrey and I will sleep . . . at the mill. Geoffrey, at least, will sleep, while I proceed to the château after dark and try my luck with the fourteenth stair. Meanwhile, Diana and Carstairs will return to Marseilles. They will go straight to the British consulate and ask for Bosanquet, and this time they will have a chit from me. Tell him to wire to London and have the 1915–1919 DK codes sent out by the next King's Messenger."

Diana had been scribbling on the back of an envelope while he was speaking. "DK codes for 1915–1919," she repeated.

"That covers the period when Seguin was connected with the British service," continued Granby, replying to my unspoken question.

"And then what happens?" asked Diana.

"You will come here," replied Granby.

"Excellent," said Carstairs. "There is only one thing we might alter."

"I don't usually alter my plans," said Granby shortly.

"I think you must in this case," insisted Carstairs. "Geoffrey will take Diana to Marseilles and I will accompany you to Madame Seguin and hold the mill while you deal with the wicked count."

"You will do nothing of the kind," I objected. "This isn't your show, old boy."

"But look here, the risk — " began Carstairs.

"Exactly," I said.

I looked at Diana. She turned her head, but the pressure of her hand on my knee, light and instantly withdrawn, showed me that she agreed. Carstairs still protested but was immediately overborne, though he didn't like the arrangement.

In five minutes our plans were laid, a chit to Bosanquet written and we were ready to leave the café.

"How long will it take you to get to Marseilles?" asked Granby.

We were now walking towards the Rolls.

"Between two and three hours," said Diana.

"Then you ought to be there in time for lunch," continued Granby.

"There is rather a good *bouillabaisse* in Marseilles," I murmured to the air.

But Carstairs failed to rise.

We clambered into the car. Diana took the wheel and a quarter of an hour later dropped us at the crossroads. There Granby gave her some final instructions. She and Carstairs, after seeing the British consul at Marseilles, were to return to the mill. They were to leave the car in a big barn on the other side of the road which we had

both noticed when we had first visited the miller. They were then to wait at the mill if neither of us happened to be there, though, as Granby insisted, I at least should be on the spot if all went according to programme. Then as soon as Granby had secured the miller's message, we should all return to Marseilles and await the codes from London.

So we planned.

The car turned, backed and disappeared in a cloud of southern dust along the road from which we had just come. I saw Diana's hand waving us farewell, as she swept round the bend and was lost to sight.

Wearily I began to walk up the road over the short distance which separated us from the mill. I now realised how tired I was. My mind was refusing to work any more, confused by all that had happened in the past twenty-four hours. I needed only one thing; to lie down and sleep. I think Granby was tired too, for his face looked drawn and his eyes were heavy with fatigue.

Madame Seguin at the mill was at first inclined to hesitate and it was Rose who finally overruled her misgivings. Granby, without giving anything material away, hinted that he was conducting certain inquiries in the district; that we desired the utmost privacy and above all did not wish our presence to be known at the château. It was then that Rose became quite definitely our ally, and helped us to reassure her mother and persuade her to put us up. Not that it needed much persuasion. The widow Seguin was clearly accustomed to receiving the law from her family. Granby intimated that we should want to remain in the mill until the result of the post mortem on the late Robert Seguin

was known. His reference to the post mortem, received by the widow with an expression of weak bewilderment, brought a gleam of hard intelligence to the eyes of Rose.

We were taken into the house and Madame Seguin placed at our disposal a large room in the upper part, containing two truckle beds and other furniture which I need not trouble to describe.

I threw myself on one of the beds and fell instantly fast asleep.

The day was blotted out and everything at once forgotten.

Awaking, I found myself in darkness and started up in panic. Then, overwhelmingly, I had that curious sense of time lost and things undone which comes upon you when you have overslept. My mind was still confused with dreams. It seemed that Caramac, risen from his bath chair, was standing at the foot of my bed urging me to introduce Diana to the count and saying that nothing but good would come of it and that he had long desired to be of service to us all.

"Granby," I said, as soon as I realised where I was. "Granby, are you awake?"

There was no answer. I stumbled to the floor, my mouth hot and dry, and moved over to the other truckle bed.

It was empty.

Where was Granby?

I looked at my watch. It was between half-past six and seven. Night had only just fallen then, but I had been asleep for over nine hours. Whither had Granby gone? I walked to the window and, thrusting it open, peered

out, straining my ears to listen. Except the chatter of the river over the stones and the shrill grasshoppers, I could hear nothing. Then, abruptly, I caught sight of a shadow on the white road leading to the aqueduct, a shadow that wavered and receded.

Who was that walking up the road?

I realised at once what had happened. Granby had allowed me to sleep on while he started for the château. We had never really discussed his departure. It had been vaguely understood — or rather he had himself assumed — that I should remain at the mill and await the return of Diana and Carstairs from Marseilles. And now he had given me the slip. Granby was going back to the dovecote alone.

I cannot quite explain my sudden act. I merely knew that I could not let him fade away like that into the night. There was something in the moving of that quiet shadow along the road that drew me from the room with no will of my own to resist. I ran quickly downstairs, opened the front door, and a moment later was hurrying after it, between a walk and a run, determined not to be thus abandoned.

Soon I found myself at the turn of the road where the great aqueduct joins the living rock. Which way? Granby did not know the road very well, so he would probably take the familiar path leading from the inn. I would therefore cross the aqueduct, enter the tunnel at the far end and come out upon the path somewhere near the place where Granby and I had crossed it that morning.

I climbed the spiral staircase which leads to the top of the aqueduct, ran along the old water course and

reached the tunnel. Thenceforward my progress was slower, for it was very dark. I moved on, however, as quickly as I could and soon came out upon the main path to the château. There I paused and listened for Granby — only just in time — for I heard at once the sound of footsteps.

I drew back hastily and took cover.

Archimedes, followed by two of his Negroes, was climbing the path. The two Negroes walked one in front of the other, behind a short man in a black coat. He passed quite close to me and I saw that he had a high thin nose and a face that was close-shaven except for a white moustache. His hair also was white under the brim of his hat. I could see him fairly clearly, for the moon was coming up over the hill and it was at the full. He was walking briskly, looking neither to right nor left.

At that instant I felt a hand on my arm, and before I could make another sound a hand was pressed upon my mouth.

"Wait, Geoffrey," whispered Granby in my ear. "Don't make a noise."

For a moment we stood motionless, side by side. I was trying to remember the man with the white moustache, for I had seen him somewhere before.

"What are you doing here?" whispered Granby in my ear, when they had passed. "This isn't in the programme, you know."

"Sorry, Granby," I whispered back. "But I saw you going off. I never meant to let you go alone."

I could feel rather than see him looking at me in that quizzical way of his.

"Very touching," he said at last. "But if you are really coming with me on this little trip you must make considerably less noise. I could hear you a mile off."

He slipped into the path as he spoke and we walked on together. The undergrowth now showed black and white in the moonlight.

"Granby," I said presently, "who is that fellow who passed just now? I have seen him before somewhere."

"You recognised him, did you?" said Granby.

"Not exactly," I replied, "but I have seen him before."

"It's General Tanyi," he replied. "During the war he commanded the tenth Hungarian Corps in the Austrian Second Army."

"Tanyi?" I repeated. "By George, yes, I remember now."

I had seen him only once, at a moment which had impressed him upon my memory. A year or so previous, I had been passing through Geneva and I had gone as a spectator to witness a performance, or perhaps I should say a meeting, of the Council of the League of Nations. It had been a public meeting, held in a stuffy room, with walls of glass, in the converted hotel which serves as the headquarters of the Secretariat. The proceedings had been dull, consisting chiefly in the reading of memoranda which conveyed nothing to the lay mind except that their authors were extremely anxious to avoid any definite conclusions. Then somebody, the Japanese member, I think it was, had read a report upon certain complaints which had been submitted by the representatives of the Transylvanian minority in Rou-

mania, who had formerly been Hungarian subjects. The Council, without comment, had adopted the report which so far as I could gather dismissed the alleged grievances as non-proven. Whereupon a little man with a white moustache had risen in the audience protesting violently that the Council was neglecting its duties. He had been ejected by a couple of ushers, not without a certain amount of confusion, and the press had made merry with the episode on the following day.

So that was General Tanyi, and he was going to the château. I told Granby of the incident as we walked along.

"Yes," he said, "I remember reading of that affair. It brought a little fresh air into the Council chamber — not in its way a bad thing. He is a fierce nationalist, is Tanyi, and I don't wonder at it. He had all his estates confiscated under the new Roumanian Agrarian Law and has been at the bottom of most of the disturbances in that part of the world for the past four or five years."

"I wonder what he is doing here?" I said.

"Perhaps you would like to run along and ask him," suggested Granby.

I looked at my watch. I had assumed for some reason that it must be very late and saw to my surprise that it was not yet eight o'clock.

"Why did you start so early?" I asked.

"The best time," replied Granby, "to enter a house uninvited is when the inmates are having dinner — a very good tip which I got from Bill Withers of Hoxton, after he had been sent down for his third stretch. The chances are much better when they are all loudly dis-

cussing the soup than when they are tucked up in their beds and apparently dead to the world."

He touched me on the arm as he spoke and we halted. We were now at the end of the path. To our left glimmered the pillars of the demilune, with the dark tower of the dovecote beyond, but if Granby had hoped to reach it unseen he was promptly undeceived. Lights were festooned between the colonnades, and the naked Venus on the marble fountain shone in a golden haze. Her fountain was lit with floating lights on the edge of the pool supported on the big green leaves of nenuphars. Music sounded somewhere. The night air was very still and warm, for the *mistral* had completely died away at noon.

"Stay here," whispered Granby.

"I won't," I answered.

"An army marches on its stomach," said Granby, lying down and beginning to crawl forward. "And, if you insist on coming, don't make a sound."

We moved on very slowly, keeping close to the undergrowth until we got near to the demilune. My eyes could now take in details. A table laid with plate of silver gilt and exotic fruit, stood close to the edge of the fountain. Between the columns I perceived the Count de Vallantré, in his white satin, seated upon a high gilded chair. Beside him was Caramac, and next to him was Richards, dressed as an eighteenth-century divine with a flowing wig. Behind them the Negro servants in their scarlet liveries moved to and fro.

Granby plucked me by the sleeve and I understood that I was to follow him again. We crawled forward another twenty yards until we reached the shelter of a

low cypress hedge about three feet high and very black in the moonlight. It prolonged one end of the demilune and we were now within less than ten yards of the table.

"Here he comes," said a voice in French.

I raised my head cautiously and beheld a gleam of torches beside the château. They were coming nearer and I feared that they would shine upon our lair and betray us. Then they wavered and grew still and I saw that they were carried by four servants. In front of them was Archimedes, who was, however, quickly thrust aside. General Tanyi stood forward and addressed himself to the persons at the table.

"Here I am, gentlemen," he said abruptly, "and I have good news. The date is now fixed. It is for the fifteenth."

CHAPTER X

I COMMIT A TRESPASS

"Lie quiet," whispered Granby, "and listen — listen for all you are worth."

The Count de Vallantré was speaking.

"I am sorry, General," he said, "that you were delayed on the road, but I am delighted to welcome you."

General Tanyi seemed for the first time to notice the odd attire of Richards and the count. He stood, stiffly regarding them, a look of surprise — or was it contempt? — in his fierce blue eyes, though the effect of his stare was, I noted, somewhat marred by a curious droop of the left eyelid, the result, I fancied, of an old wound, the scar of which remained upon his forehead.

The count smiled.

"A little whim of mine," he said, lifting the white satin skirt of his embroidered coat. "I hope you will humour me. Modern clothes are so dull and quite out of the picture. There is a uniform laid out for you — a marshal of the period. You perceive the setting. This demilune was put up by one of my ancestors, Amadée de Vallantré. I feel we should try to live up to it."

"We have business to discuss," said Tanyi shortly.

His air was that of a man who regarded these trifles as vexatious and unnecessary.

A soft voice broke in suddenly.

"If you don't mind, General. I think it would be well to fall in with the count's suggestion."

It was Caramac speaking from his wheel chair. General Tanyi looked towards him and bowed. Caramac, I noted, was dressed in his ordinary clothes.

"I have no objection," said Tanyi shortly.

Richards, his doctor's gown bellying behind him, rose from the table and said something to the general in a low voice. Evidently the count was to be humoured, for Richards drew Tanyi away towards a striped tent of the kind we had found so useful in the dovecote, pitched a short distance away. The general followed and Archimedes fell in behind them. They all disappeared into the tent. Richards, however, almost immediately returned and came back quickly to the table.

"You heard what he said," he observed to the count, who sat, smiling, rather vacantly, upon his high chair. "It is fixed for the fifteenth. I wish it were earlier. Anything may happen in the meantime — especially with those friends of yours at large again, Caramac — "

Richards was now between me and the wheel chair and I did not hear what Caramac said in answer.

The heavy voice of Richards broke in again.

"What exactly have they been able to find out? That is the question . . ."

"We know at least the source of their information," said Caramac. "Anything they may know came from the miller. Anything the miller may have known came from his daughter Marie. And anything Marie may know came from the count."

"Marie?" said the count. "Only God knows what Marie knows."

He waved a hand airily, holding in the other a Venetian glass full of a pale clear liquid. He was, I now perceived, slightly fuddled.

"Marie," he repeated, "is most inquisitive. By that sin the angels fell. I can do nothing with her unless I tell her things. And then what fire! What passion!"

His eyes gleamed in the light of the candles. So still was the night that they burned straight upwards like slim spears.

"Well, my dear Count," said Caramac, "I suppose it is hopeless your trying to remember what you have or have not said to Marie. But you may be sure she told it to the miller and we know that the miller sent a message to Colonel Granby. We must leave it at that. May I suggest, however, that, when next you entertain her you should try to find out exactly what she does know and exactly what the miller was proposing to do with her information when he died."

"Marie," muttered the count. "I've just about done with Marie."

"Still thinking of the charmer you met this morning," said Richards.

The count sighed like a stricken tyre.

"I hope to meet her again," he said. "For to-night, Marie is mistress of the revels."

"I would suggest," broke in Caramac smoothly, "that this evening we do not linger too long over the . . . er . . . dessert. General Tanyi is more an antique Roman than a Dane. He may not like it."

The count flushed.

"What the devil does it matter," he blustered, "whether Tanyi likes it or not? Tanyi isn't paying for

this show. He'll get what he wants and he has nothing to lose. And to-night he is going to enjoy himself. We are all going to enjoy ourselves, do you understand?"

The count looked fiercely round. Richards said nothing, but began to finger a glass upon the table. Caramac caught and held the eyes of his host, who looked uneasily away and then, picking up a bunch of grapes, began to throw them one by one across the table into the darkness.

"Power," I heard him mutter. "Power . . . the one sensation left."

"Exactly," said Caramac softly. "You shall have all the power you need. But don't forget that Tanyi is necessary. We need at least one man who is entirely disinterested. General Tanyi believes in our enterprise and I think he will very probably die for it. Somebody must take the risk and unless you, my dear Count, are prepared to do so, I advise you not to forget that we have in our good general a prospective hero and martyr."

"Have it your own way," said the count. "How do we handle the fellow?"

Caramac shrugged his shoulders.

"I am not well acquainted with General Tanyi," he said.

"It's quite simple," broke in Richards. "Tanyi, as Caramac says, is a fanatic. He will do anything you want, provided he is convinced that it will help his cause. It is the only thing that matters to him."

At that moment a splendid figure in blue and gold became visible in the candlelight. It was General Tanyi returning, very magnificent in his clothes, the full dress

of a marshal of France in 1760. He sat down, obviously not well pleased with his masquerade, on the right of the count.

"Well," he said, abruptly, "I suppose you have been talking about me in my absence. What is it?"

"You are right, my dear General," said Caramac with a charming smile. "We were congratulating ourselves on having secured your coöperation. Your courage and devotion to our project, with the funds so generously supplied by our host, the organising ability of Mr. Richards and my own scientific knowledge should suffice to achieve our aims. I may as well say that my own preparations are fairly complete. Time was short and I would ask you to remember that a little less than two months ago I was still a prisoner in the *Confinati.* I have had to work hard, but I think I can say that technically, we are prepared now. The last consignments went off a week ago."

"I can say the same for the organisation," said Richards. "Thirty-seven branches of the League are successfully established and are ready to act at a moment's notice. They are merely waiting for the signal."

All turned as with one accord to gaze at Tanyi, who looked them frankly and sternly in the face.

"I am ready, gentlemen," he said. "If you can make arrangements for my personal safety — so much the better; for I might still be of use in the troubled times which must follow. But I realise that it may be difficult and I am prepared to take the consequences."

There was a moment of uneasy silence.

"We shall, of course, do our utmost to ensure your

safe return," said Caramac at last. "My own work is finished. The distribution, thanks to Richards, has passed off without a hitch."

"You get your money's worth, Count," said Richards.

The Count de Vallantré looked at him with a vague disdain.

"What is the worth of money?" he asked. "It has never brought me what I wanted."

"Possibly, sir," said General Tanyi, "you have never wanted it sufficiently."

"Power," said the count softly. "It is what I have always wanted. I have never had it or had it only in drifts and snatches, a thing of compromise, so much for me, so much for you, the power to buy what and whom I pleased at a price, the power of a heckled minister in a stuffy French Cabinet, with a red ribbon in my buttonhole and a horde of inky clerks to run about or hold open the door for 'Monsieur le Ministre.' That is not power. At one time I governed a black province in the heart of Africa. I could flog whom I pleased and deal out justice or injustice as I chose. But even that was only a shadow. The peasant who beats his horse or his dog has as much. Power — "

He broke off and waved his big arms, stiff with embroidered satin, the cuffs turned back to the elbows, in the air, describing a huge gesture.

"It is — power," he concluded lamely.

I saw Richards from where I watched under the cypresses exchange with Caramac a meaning smile. The general, however, was frankly bewildered. Then he, too, looked at Caramac, who nodded his head slightly. "Humour him" seemed the order of the day

and, as far as I could make out, they all seemed to be humouring one another.

At that instant Archimedes appeared with the four Negro servants bearing dishes.

Dinner was served and the count drew up to the table. His discourse upon power had apparently cost him some effort, for he drew a lace handkerchief once or twice across his forehead.

I had as yet made no attempt to understand what was passing. It seemed as though I was watching a fantastic film produced by Pabst or Cavalcanti. But this was real life. I could feel the slight pressure of Granby's foot against the calf of my leg, as he shifted, ever so cautiously, his position.

For the next hour I heard but little of what was said. Caramac, who ate nothing but a few rusks, remained in his wheel chair a little outside the group of three. The others had drawn closer and what with the light chatter of the table and the passing of the servants it was impossible to catch much, especially as at a signal from the count, the music which we had heard on our arrival again burst forth from the unseen musicians. The dinner dragged. I need not record such conversation as I heard. It was not very illuminating for it became soon apparent that the count and Richards had little attention to spare from the food and wine. Of the dishes served, Tanyi now and then took a fragment — the wing of a pheasant or a brace of quails in aspic — which remained for the most part untasted on his plate, but the other two ate like the *Roi Soleil* in his glory. The count absorbed large quantities of champagne, but did not appear to get any drunker. Richards, on the

other hand, was soon quite clearly the worse for wear.

The music, of an exquisite purity, played lightly under the keen stars and I remembered the minuet of the previous day. The count liked, apparently, to deal in contrasts.

"I think," said the count, from behind a mound of purple grapes, "that it is almost time for dessert."

Almost an hour had elapsed. The cramp in my left leg was excruciating and I was impatient to be gone. Once or twice I had made to move, but Granby had held me fast to the spot. The music ceased. Chairs were pushed back and we could again hope to hear what was passing.

Richards held between his palms a generous glass of brandy at which he sipped from time to time. He was now, I saw, very drunk, having, for so big and sanguine a man, an astonishingly poor head for liquor. I realised that for him the count's hospitality had more charms than he was willing to confess.

"Dessert," he said. "What have you to offer'sh tonight, my dear Count?"

The count clapped his hands three times. The music broke forth again and there slipped like shadows from between the pillars of the demilune four or five graceful figures. They approached the fountain and began to perform a kind of ballet. The thick fingers of Richards were gripping a fold of the damask. General Tanyi sat stiffly upright in his splendid uniform. Evidently he disapproved. Caramac looked a moment at the light figures, then with a little sigh produced a leather-bound book from his pocket and began to turn its pages. The girls drifted nearer. They were now on the edge of

the pool. The masked lights threw them into sharp relief against the placid water so that the veils which covered them melted into air. They stooped to the water and as they did so a ripple broke its surface and there rose beside the statue in the midst a girl who posed in mockery of its alabaster loveliness, an Aphrodite of flesh and blood.

There was a light tinkle of breaking glass. Richards had got to his feet. He stumbled down the few steps leading up to the table and approached the group by the fountain. Light arms waved about him, light lips were offered and withdrawn. His fingers tore and rent the veils. Then, suddenly, he tripped and fell. There was a loud splash and a splutter of shrill laughter. Richards had missed the margin of the pool and tumbled into it head first. He emerged dripping and stood waist deep in the water. With his gown spreading out behind him and his draggled wig he looked like a large seal begging a fish.

The count too had risen.

"Marie," he called.

The girl posing beside the statue turned to him with a smile, slipped once more into the pool and with a few swift strokes reached the margin. She climbed the steps and stood, the water drops gleaming on her breasts and shoulders, her blonde hair ashen in the light.

So that was Marie.

The Count de Vallantré, who had not moved a muscle of his face at the mishap of Richards, handed her a huge silver goblet.

"Make me, good Vulcan," he said, "a deep bowl and carve on it neither Charles' wain nor the sad Orion but

carve me out a vine with its swelling grapes and Cupid, Bacchus and Bathillus pressing them together."

I felt the light pressure of fingers upon my neck, then came Granby's whisper.

"There will be no more business to-night, and now is our chance. Follow me, old boy; and don't make a sound."

I crawled in his wake along the cypress hedge until we reached the end of it and stood in the deep shadow. We were now fifty yards from the dovecote. Granby got to his feet and we went silently and carefully towards it. Beside the door we paused.

"Lie down here," whispered Granby, "and keep *cave*."

I sank to the ground so that I might be able to see any one who moved in our direction against the sky. A faint clink of metal came from above me and, glancing up, I saw that Granby held in his hand a small oil can from the Rolls. He proceeded to use it upon the bolts of the door. There were three or four light screeches, as Granby cautiously withdrew them, and then the faintest breath of colder air upon the back of my neck showed me that the door was open. From the lighted patch by the dinner table and the pool came sounds of laughter.

"Good," I said to myself, "make all the noise you can, my dear Count."

Granby had disappeared. By now he was busy on the fourteenth stair. It could not take him long to find that paper. In a few minutes we should be safely away.

Abruptly a step sounded in the gravel. I turned my head to the left. A shadowy figure came between me

and the sky with something white glimmering in the midst of it.

"So I told you as much as all that, did I, my dear?"

It was the count speaking, and the white patch in his arms was Marie.

"I must have been far gone, very far gone. And it all went straight to your father. That was really very naughty of you. You are going to make amends now, my precious. But business first. You must show me where he hid his information."

The heavy crunch of his footsteps came on slowly.

The voice of Marie was no more than a murmur. I could not hear the answer she made. But I could see them clearly now. He was carrying her half-wrapped in a cloak of some gorgeous stuff.

"The man is as strong as an ox," I thought and it was my last coherent reflection.

For he was coming straight for the dovecote and in another moment he would be counting his way to the fourteenth stair.

CHAPTER XI

I AM PROSECUTED

I must move or the count would come sprawling over me, and yet for a moment I was paralysed. His stocky figure, with the white glimmer of the girl in his arms, curiously foreshortened, loomed above me. I got to my knees. I had three things to do: to cover the five yards to the dovecote before he did, to do so without being seen or heard, and to warn Granby.

I failed on all counts except the last. I had hardly risen to my feet before I was seen — indeed, if the count hadn't been carrying Marie he would have seized me. I heard his cry of astonishment, showing that I had been viewed. I therefore made no further attempt at concealment, but ran straight to the door of the dovecote.

"Quick, Granby," I shouted, "They are here."

Even as I spoke the count was on me. My shoulders were seized from behind and a hand gripped the collar of my coat. A thick voice, breathing hot in my ear, called loudly for Archimedes.

The count was certainly a strong man, but he could give me twenty years and they had been twenty years of soft living. I tore myself free and struck out. The blow got him on the neck under the Adam's apple and the shout was choked in his throat. He struck out

wildly, catching me a glancing blow on the mouth which opened my lip again. By this time I could see him more distinctly, for in our encounter we had swung around so that he was between me and the pool of light by the table and the fountain. The blow on the mouth had stung me to fury. I let out with all my strength and catching him on the point of the jaw, laid him flat. At that instant, however, I felt hands, soft but very tenacious, gripping my ankles and a voice which came somewhere from the ground level. Folds of something thick and soft were clinging round my knees. A sharp pain above the heel caused me to kick out suddenly.

Marie had me by the ankles and she had bitten me like the little vixen she was, while the cloak which the millionaire had thrown round her hampered my efforts to escape.

All this takes a long time to tell, but there could have been no more than a minute between the first shout of the count on recognising me and the end of my struggle with Marie. I dragged one foot from her grasp and bent down to fend her off. But I had forgotten the Count de Vallantré. I think — and I hope — I must have trodden on his face. At any rate, I slipped and came down heavily on the back of my head. Instinctively, half because I could not help myself, I rolled sideways. There was a crackling of bushes and some one — Marie, I suppose — was screaming now somewhere above me. Meanwhile I was still rolling and continued to do so until I landed, with another thump, six feet or so below the level of my struggle with the count.

I soon realised what had happened. The ground sloped on one side sharply away from the dovecote.

That curious building had been constructed, not indeed on the edge of a cliff, but on the summit of a steep slope thickly covered with bushes. Possibly the hill may once have been terraced for vines or olive trees which had long since disappeared. I had fallen, so to speak, as far as the first terrace.

I got to my feet and stood still, but only for an instant. A thud within a few feet of me made me realise that if I stayed there any longer, capture was inevitable. I started blindly forward, following the rough terrace and making a good deal of noise in getting through the bushes. After I had gone fifty yards or so I paused to recover breath and get my bearings. I had now come to the end of the terrace onto which I had fallen. Behind me, as I looked, was a scene of wild confusion. Torches were waving. The group by the pool had scattered, except for Caramac whom I could see still seated in his invalid chair. He had put away his book and was holding instead something which might have been a revolver.

Three or four Negroes came and went in silhouette, looking, in their scarlet liveries, like devils in a miracle play. General Tanyi moved swiftly past the margin of the pool. In the full glare of the masked lights he presented a fantastic figure, in blue and silver, his wig slightly awry, his face white and tense, a slim blade gleaming in his right hand. He had put it on for ornament but now it was apparently for use. Abruptly he was swallowed up in the shadows and I thought no more of him, for fifty yards away came the sharp crack of a revolver, followed by a moment of utter silence, after which the babel broke out worse than ever. I could hear

Richards shouting blasphemies. He was urging the Negroes to surround the dovecote.

Granby then was still there, discovered and beset.

There came another shout, followed by a guttural cry.

What was Granby doing? Was he holding them at bay, or was he already in their hands? Should I go back? Or should I — but the decision was taken from me. There was a rustle from the end of the terrace; a bush swayed and parted; and abruptly a black face, with white eyeballs and shining teeth, was thrust into my own. It gave a cry. My right hand was resting on the end of the terrace and I realised that it was grasping one of the stones of which it was composed and that the stone was loose. Almost automatically I dashed it into the grinning face.

There was a yell. I turned and fled.

Two things prevented my immediate capture. One was the darkness, which made it impossible for any one to see me in the undergrowth. The other was the distraction of the attack upon Granby in the dovecote. On my part there was no distraction. I had only one idea — to put as much ground as possible between me and the face into which I had dashed the stone. It was useless going back to Granby now. My one chance was to get clear and bring him help.

For the second time that day I crawled and fought my way through the bushes and scrub surrounding the château. The undergrowth grew presently thinner and I had to pause. I was breathless and exhausted and there were no further shouts and cries from the castle to flog me forward. I lay flat on the ground, perceiving,

as I did so, that I had reached the margin of the path which led from the château down to the hotel. My mouth was very sore, with a salt taste in it from the wound in my lip, and now that I had stopped moving, the tendon behind my heel began to ache where it had been bitten by Marie.

I strained my ears. Why was it so quiet? I could hear nothing but my own thumping heart. What had happened? Had they taken Granby?

Soon, from somewhere not far away, I heard a faint crackling, as though some one had set his foot upon a dry twig. For a moment I knew panic. The dark wood pressed in upon me, crawling with shadows. Here was their prey but where were the hunters? Somewhere near at hand they ranged, brutes trained to the call of some one not far short of a madman, their instincts alert and roused. What chance had I, a civilised man, against these savages?

I thought again of Granby and his peril, and, pulling myself together, crawled forward by inches till I felt the stony surface of the path beneath my hands. There it was very dark. I could only just see the branches of the trees etched above me against a sky only a shade less dark than they. I moved off, keeping on hands and knees. I must reach the end of the path and knock up the hotel. From there it should be possible to get help and protection. Ultimately, of course, I must get into touch with the police at Remoulins. They had been disinclined to act upon our previous visit, but they would scarcely ignore the tale I had to tell them now. Otherwise I must wait for Diana and Carstairs and for the result of their visit to Marseilles. But that would mean

waiting . . . waiting . . . perhaps far into the morning. Would Granby be able to hold out as long as that? Or had they got him already? And, if they had got him, would they dare, with me still free to give the alarm, do more than hold him as a prisoner?

My progress through the scrub was terribly slow. Every now and again I stopped to listen in the vain hope of discovering the whereabouts of my pursuers. The path was steeper now and turned a little to the left. Here the undergrowth cleared, and suddenly, with an intense feeling of relief, I recognised where I was. I had reached the point at which the faint remains of the aqueduct cut across the path. There stood the great pile of stones where Granby and I had turned aside that morning. Ten minutes sharp walking would bring me now to the hotel. I got cautiously to my feet, and again I listened.

There came a shrill, melancholy, reedlike note from the woods, answered by another close at hand. For a little while the plaintive duologue went on, two owls calling to each other across the little valley. My ears, grown sensitive, could hear the distant chatter of the Gardon down by the mill. Far below, as it seemed, a cricket was cheeping. All about me was the clean scent of thyme and rosemary which I had crushed in passing. What had the peace of this autumn night to do with the fantastic horror of the château on the hill? It was not in nature that I should be standing there, a desperate fugitive, in the heart of the most civilised country in Europe. In another few hours, tourists would be scrambling upon that very path to get a nearer view of the great aqueduct.

I took a step forward. There was a whir and clatter of wings and the sharp cry of a bird. It rocketed up from between my feet, and swept with beating pinions above the trees. I gripped my right wrist with my left hand to steady myself — a trick I have when I am startled — and as I stood thus, I suddenly heard a step on the path some distance away in front of me, and a faint crackling — or so it seemed — away to my right.

All my panic returned. Some one was on the path. I wheeled about swiftly, passing behind the pile of stones, and dropped, as quietly as I could, to the narrow ledge covered with thick bushes and scrub which had once been the path of the water of the aqueduct. I began to move slowly along the ledge, but soon realised that, having left the main path, it was hopeless for me to attempt to blunder through the wood in my present fashion. Every movement I made must give me away.

I stopped and thought desperately. The ledge along which I was now crawling led direct to the aqueduct, passing, as I think I have already explained, through the artificial tunnel driven through the hill by the engineers of Napoleon III in a vain effort to discover the exact course of the water. I had taken Diana and Carstairs through it only the day before yesterday. If only I could reach the tunnel, I might make my way through it to the aqueduct itself and thus down to the road. It seemed the only thing to do.

Soon I had come to a parting of the ways. The aqueduct, turning a little to the left on reaching the hill, skirted a deep cleft some thirty feet down. At that very moment, as once again I was taking my bearings, I heard footsteps within ten yards of me. I took an in-

stant decision. This was clearly no moment to move further. I was bewildered and tired. I could not remember how far away was the tunnel. I could see nothing, and in that thick gloom every branch that moved and every twig that crackled, was a threat from my invisible pursuers.

I slipped from the path, and wriggled into the cleft as far down as I could get. The last six feet or so I fell abruptly, for it was perpendicular, but I landed soft on a bed of leaves. There I stayed. I could make no further effort. If they found me — well, that was the end.

I lay as I had fallen — for how long I do not know. I think I must have slept, for strange dreams tormented what remained of my intelligence. I was on the path, running desperately, but my feet clung to the ground and could only be lifted with a supreme effort. It was as though my shoes were shod with the suckers of an octopus. That must be Caramac coming up behind me, speeding softly and silently in his invalid chair. "It's driven by electricity," somebody whispered in my ear, "and it moves very fast — much faster than you, Mr. Carroll." He was upon me now, a lean figure with a white face, and a slim hand which gestured towards me with a silver fork. "It is poisoned," whispered the same voice in my ear, a little huskily, "and you will die in agony."

The fork was thrust forward. There was a sharp pain in my cheek.

I awoke — if this indeed were sleep — to find the grey light of morning creeping into my hiding place. The end of a twig was scratching me below the left eye.

I got rather shakily to my knees. What next? I could

hardly hope to make my way back to the path leading to the hotel. Every approach would be picketed by now. I must move, as I had originally intended, to the tunnel and trust to luck.

Cautiously I dragged myself out of the cleft and inevitably I made a fair amount of noise in doing so, for the ascent was very steep and I had to pull myself up by the bushes. The noise didn't seem to matter so much now, for the wood itself was alive with the early sounds of morning. Birds were singing and the wind was rustling in the branches.

Soon I perceived the tunnel, its black mouth yawning in front of me, not twenty yards away. I set my foot on the path and went towards it. Once through the tunnel, I should find freedom, light and the company of men. I reached the opening and made to enter it. Then I stopped. The mouth of the tunnel was overhung with bushes of evergreen oak and through the foliage a black arm had come groping down, and a black leg, seeking a foothold, was thrust almost into my face. At the same time from the heart of the bush, came a guttural exclamation. The Negro had seen me.

My wits returned. I sprang for the black leg and pulled it sharply. There was a shout and the great Negro came sprawling down upon me out of the bush, tearing desperately for a hand hold, and landing with a thud on the path. The leg I held twisted to the right and something cracked like a bough. The man gave a yell of pain. I loosed my hold upon the leg and took to my heels down the tunnel.

I had done it now, given myself properly away. I saw myself bolting down the channel of the aqueduct with

the Negroes shooting straight between the rough stone walls. They could not fail to hit me there. But no. I was now at the end of the tunnel, on the aqueduct itself, and I noticed that they did not lie in a straight line, but that the aqueduct curved slightly to the left, so that entering I should be momentarily hidden from any pursuer in the tunnel.

But where could I hide? A shaft of morning sunlight struck down through a large hole in the stone slabs above my head as if in answer to my unuttered question. This was my only chance.

The Pont du Gard is, as I have already mentioned, roofed with large slabs of stone to prevent the evaporation of the water. During the two thousand years or so during which the aqueduct has stood, some of these stones have been displaced, so you can climb out of the channel and stand on the slabs, or even, if you have a good head, walk or run across the roof itself.

I wasted no further time. Setting my foot on the side of the passage, covered with lime deposits from the water which had flowed there for hundreds of years, I swung myself up through the gap in the roof and, pulling myself to the top of the aqueduct, lay flat, watching the channel beneath me through a chink between the slabs. The pursuit, if it came that way, would pass beneath me.

Sure enough, I hadn't been there for three minutes when I heard a patter of footsteps and, through the chink between the slabs, I saw six of the count's Negro servants pass in rapid succession immediately below me, their woolly heads moving like black beads upon a string. They ran silently, with the stealthy swiftness of

animals, and their bare feet made no sound on the stone floor.

I forced myself to count a hundred after the last of them had passed; and then, getting cautiously to my feet, I walked back over the slabs towards the tunnel which I had just left. The way would now, I hoped, be clear in that direction down to the inn and there was another path upon that side, if only I could find it, which turned off abruptly to the left at the point where the aqueduct met the tunnel.

I had by this time crossed the aqueduct and before me was the path, clear and easy to see. There was even a notice indicating the way down to the road, with an arrow pointing its direction.

I made better speed now, for hope was strong within me, and in a few moments I was upon the good hard road which I had never thought to tread. The hotel was now not more than two hundred yards away. I rounded a small bend. There before me was the inn. My spirits bounded high and as suddenly sank to zero. There, indeed, was the inn, but there also, not forty yards away, was the tall black figure of Archimedes, in his white duck suit, in voluble conversation with the innkeeper.

I swerved instinctively to the left, plunging thus into the undergrowth which covered the fifty yards separating the road from the waters of the Gardon. What else could I have done? I could not go back for the Negroes were upon the aqueduct. They would by now have realised the trick I had played on them and were in all probability returning. I could not go forward without running into the strong arms of Archimedes. I could not

imagine what he might be telling the innkeeper, but I felt sure his tale would be plausible enough. Either to go forward or backward was certain capture.

I was now by the margin of the river. It sang happily to itself over the loose stones, a limpid stream, with here and there a deep pool, in which, no doubt, fat trout were lurking. On the other bank, perhaps a hundred yards away, was the mill of the late Robert Seguin, and I could see the little compound in which Granby and I had talked with his widow and with Doctor Peyrolles.

There, perhaps, was a way out. I was more likely to get shelter and help at the mill now that Archimedes had queered my pitch with the innkeeper. I stepped into the river. It was very cold, but the shock braced me, though the water did not come above my thighs. For a moment I stopped, bent down, thrust my head into it and drank greedily. Then I continued on my way, stumbling and wading till I was two thirds across the stream and had reached a bank of shingle, high and dry. As I made to cross it, however, I heard a shout to the left and, on turning my head, I saw a tiny black figure on the top of the aqueduct gesticulating and pointing in my direction.

I had been viewed again.

I stumbled towards the bank, but, losing my footing, fell into a deepish pool on the far side, so that I had to swim three or four strokes before I could recover my feet. I was now by the idle wheel itself. Grasping its sides, I clambered up with difficulty, till at last I stood on a steep slope of shingle, crowned with the paving of the little compound of the mill.

A moment later I stood in the compound, dripping and face to face with Madame Seguin.

She did not exclaim upon seeing me. The late miller had obviously accustomed her to taking things as they came. She merely looked at me with her pale, bewildered eyes.

"Quick, Madame," I said. "Have you a telephone?"

"Telephone?" she echoed.

"Telephone," I repeated.

She shook her head.

"There is a telephone at the hotel, Monsieur," she suggested helpfully.

I made a gesture of denial.

At that instant, turning the bend of the road which runs towards the aqueduct, came a small car laden with vegetables and market produce. I walked quickly round Madame Seguin and, running through the house, past the room in which had lain her dead husband, I arrived at the porch just as the car drew up and the man at the wheel prepared to descend.

"Monsieur," I said urgently, "are you going to Remoulins?"

He turned upon me a dull suspicious eye.

"Yes, Monsieur," he said at last. "But first I must deliver these vegetables."

He had a basket in his hand. I caught it from him and dumped it in the porch beside me. Then I thrust a hand into my pocket and produced a damp note case.

"Quick," I said. "I must go to Remoulins at once," and I thrust a hundred-franc note into his hand.

The man gazed at me in astonishment.

"Quick," I urged again, and forthwith clambered to the seat beside him.

Madame Seguin appeared at the door.

"What is this *type?*" asked the driver of the motor car.

"I know the gentleman," began Madame Seguin with a forlorn deliberation.

At that very moment, glancing over my shoulder, I saw four Negroes in their white ducks running down the road towards us.

The driver waved a dirty hand.

"If Madame knows Monsieur," he began.

The rest of the sentence was fortunately lost in the roar of the engine.

We shot forward just as the first Negro arrived in view, twenty yards behind.

The distance to Remoulins is short — three or four kilometres, and with me to urge him, the driver did it in what for him was record time. We had, in fact, arrived long before he had begun to understand the situation and I left him in the middle of the village square, looking with respectful astonishment at the note which I had thrust into his hand.

I turned quickly from the car. I had outdistanced my pursuers and had a good ten minutes to spare. There before me was the *mairie* and the police station. I stumbled up the steps and pushed open the blistered door.

Sitting at his table, as luck would have it, was the *commissaire.* He rose on seeing me, and a look of alarm and astonishment came into his face.

"Monsieur," I said, "there is no time to lose. You

remember me. I was here this morning. I will explain to you the position and I must beg you to act immediately."

The *commissaire* held up his hand. He had the air of a man driven into a corner. I should evidently have trouble with him, but I was determined that he should not evade me.

"You have no alternative, Monsieur," I added.

The *commissaire* struck a bell on his desk.

"I have, as you say, no alternative," he agreed.

My spirits rose as the door opened and a *gendarme* entered and stood beside me. Monsieur le Commissaire had accepted the inevitable.

"Monsieur Carroll," he said, "it is my duty to arrest you. . . . Trespass, forcible entry and damage to private property. . . . At the suit of his Excellency the Count de Vallantré."

CHAPTER XII

I AM CLOTHED IN PURPLE

I sat down abruptly on a rather rickety rush-bottomed chair which luckily happened to be just inside the doorway. This was too much. For the last few hours I had been trailed by savages like one of the heroes of Fenimore Cooper. I had spent such a night as I hope never to spend again in my life. I was wet to the skin with a cut lip, a bitten tendon and a ruined suit of clothes. I had, after frantic efforts, got at last into touch with the official representative of law and order and he was proposing to arrest me.

I felt a heavy hand on my shoulder. The *gendarme*, who had entered in answer to the summons of the *commissaire*, was standing over me.

"Better clap the *menottes* on him, hadn't I, sir?" he was saying.

That brought the position really home to me. I struggled to rise, but was held firmly in the chair.

"This," I protested, "is a ridiculous mistake. Send your man away and we will discuss the matter quietly."

The *commissaire*, still with that look of the timid man at bay, gazed at me with a fine assumption of severity.

"There is nothing to discuss, Monsieur," he replied. "The charge has been laid, and you have had the audacity to walk into police headquarters. I have no choice but to arrest you pending examination."

"Monsieur le Commissaire," I said, "I am a British subject and let me tell you, I have already taken steps to get into touch with the British consul at Marseilles."

"The British authorities will be informed," said the *commissaire*. "Everything will be done in order. Meanwhile, I must ask you to submit to arrest. You will in due course be brought up before the examining magistrate."

"You will be sorry for this," I protested feebly. "It is an outrage," I added, as the heavy hand of the *gendarme* almost lifted me to my feet and urged me towards the door.

"I am performing my duty," said the *commissaire*. "Perhaps, as you say, I shall be sorry. That sometimes happens."

Urged along by the *gendarme*, I found myself a moment later in the passage and opposite a small door. This was opened by my conductor by means of a key swinging from a bunch which he held in his hand. I felt a slight push in the small of the back and entered.

The door shut behind me and there was a grinding of the key in the lock. I looked about me. The cell was dreary enough in all conscience. I had been in a cell only once before. That was in Bow Street, during Boat Race night, and the excellent champagne which I consumed on that occasion had effectually dulled my memory as to details. But I had drunk no champagne or anything at all for the last fifteen hours except the ice-cold water of the Gardon, and I saw my surroundings with painful distinctness. There was a sort of iron cot clamped to one wall, on which lay a doubtful pair of blankets and a thing that might once have been a pillow.

On the opposite wall was a single window, small and fairly high up. The walls themselves were covered with dirty plaster, upon which the drunks of several generations had scribbled obscenities. There was nothing else in the room save a small stool which was rather rickety.

I performed what I suppose is the classic gesture in such circumstances. I sat down on the bed and covered my aching head with my hands. I was beyond thought and could get no further than realising that I was locked up, while Granby at the château was desperately in need of assistance. I was utterly exhausted and not a little cold from my bath in the Gardon. I sat there shivering in complete misery physical and mental, for some minutes, — perhaps half an hour.

At the end of that time a click from the direction of the door aroused me. I turned and saw that the lower half of the face of the *commissaire* was framed in a small spy hole or wicket, which he had slid back. We looked at one another vacantly for a moment.

"Well?" I said at last. "What do you want?"

Then, more hopefully, I added, "Have you heard yet from the British consul?"

He shook his head.

"No, Monsieur," he said. "I was merely looking to see that you were comfortable."

He shifted his head as he spoke, so that I could see more of his face. It wore a worried look.

"Then you can see for yourself that I am not," I replied.

He looked at me sadly.

"What would you?" he plaintively enquired. "Burglary is an offence of the most considerable and Mon-

sieur le Comte de Vallantré, ex-Minister of the Interior, is a person of the most distinguished."

He paused and eyed me curiously. He was undoubtedly ill at ease. He had been forced to act and was now beginning to be nervous of the consequences, fearing to be caught between the upper and nether millstone. I am not a vindictive man, but I hoped that in God's good time he would be ground exceeding small. For the moment, however, he was safe. The count was his protector and I was having a useful lesson in the intricacies of French provincial life. The hierarchies of that existence were slowly being made apparent and I began dimly to realise the immense force that patronage still exerts in France. To this wretched little *commissaire de police*, the Count de Vallantré was some one who had the power, if not of life and death, at any rate of promotion and disgrace, or — what was still more important to a small French official — the granting of the miserable pension on which he would, if lucky, end his days.

But the *commissaire* was again addressing me.

"Is there nothing I can do for Monsieur?" he enquired.

"Quite a number of things," I replied shortly. "A razor, for example, some dry clothes and something to eat."

"If Monsieur will realise that I perform only my duty," began the *commissaire*.

"Monsieur," I said, "realises that he is very wet and rather hungry."

"Dry clothes," said the *commissaire*. "That may be difficult. But I will do my best."

"One moment," I answered, fumbling in my pocket and producing my note case. "Buy me what you can."

I thrust the notes through the wicket.

Half an hour passed, which I spent walking up and down the cell in great weariness and affliction of spirit. I was mortally cold, but one look at the blankets on the pallet cured me of any desire to make use of them. Then, at long last, the *commissaire* appeared accompanied by the *gendarme*, who had brought me to the cell. The latter bore proudly in his arms the most appalling suit of clothes I have ever seen. It was of a deadly shade of purple with a yellow stripe to it. Still attached to the back of the coat was a card which informed me that it was the last cry. The *gendarme* placed this abomination solemnly upon the bed, with shirt and socks to match; and then, when the *commissaire* had withdrawn, produced some hot coffee, a bowl of warm water and a French Government razor.

The *gendarme* stood by while I shaved myself. He was not disposed to be friendly. He seemed, indeed, torn between contempt for my condition as a mere foreigner in trouble, and envy of my ability to purchase a suit of clothes at a moment's notice.

"Monsieur," he growled, "must be a rich type. There is upon the bed for forty francs of trousers."

He left me after I had shaved, but returned shortly with some clean blankets. By that time I was clothed — if you will permit the expression. The *gendarme* deposited the blankets on the bed and then left me for good, taking away the coffee service which he had brought me with the shaving water.

I wrapped myself in the blankets, for I was still chilled, and lay down upon the pallet.

I was dog-tired and slept deeply for a couple of hours, to awake shortly after noon, feeling ravenously hungry, but refreshed in body and mind. I even began to think hopefully again of my prospects. The *commissaire* must have communicated with the British authorities, who would of course insist on a full and fair investigation. I got off the pallet bed and began to walk up and down the cell. What should I say to the British Consul? If, as I feared, he should turn out to be the Frenchman from Nîmes or Avignon, I should have to be careful. Perhaps, however, the *commissaire* had sent to Marseilles. In that case I should be dealing with one of my own countrymen, Bosanquet, a man who knew and was known by Granby. All would then be well. On the other hand, intervention from Marseilles would take time.

Carstairs had presumably got into touch with Bosanquet by now. But Carstairs did not know of my predicament or of Granby's peril. He would merely be asking Bosanquet to send to London for the DK codes.

Meanwhile, was I ever going to get any lunch? I looked at my watch. It was twenty-five minutes past twelve. A moment later there came a sound of heavy footsteps in the passage outside and the chink and rattle of plates upon a tray.

I had been thinking only of food, but now, as the footsteps paused and a jangle of keys showed me that my door was about to be unlocked, I had a sudden instinctive impulse to escape. Would there be one man or two? Where was the *commissaire?* How many police

were likely to be on duty about the station? Well, I could but wait and see.

I sat down on the edge of the pallet and put my face in my hands. The *gendarme* who entered was a smaller man than the last. He was in his shirt sleeves and his trousers were supported by a pair of crimson braces, very striking and ornate.

"Your *déjeuner*, prisoner," he said.

I glanced at him from my cupped hands.

"*Monsieur le commissaire*, where is he?" I murmured.

"He also eats at this moment," replied the *gendarme* shortly. "If you want to see him you will have to wait until he returns to the bureau."

So the *commissaire* was absent.

I got to my feet and moved slowly towards the warder, stretching out my hands to take the tray.

He shook his head grimly.

"Stand back, prisoner," he said. "I will place the tray here on the stool."

He moved towards the object in question, looking at me carefully as he did so out of the corner of his eye.

I stood a moment, staring as vacantly as I could, and then, with a gesture which I tried not to make too dramatic, I put my hand to my heart, groaned loudly and began to sway.

"What is the matter?" said the *gendarme*, putting the tray down with a bang on the stool.

"I don't feel . . . very well," I stammered. "I think I am going to faint."

My voice trailed away into silence, and I pitched straight forward at his feet.

It was a trick I had practised to perfection, for I

had once, in some private theatricals, been cast for a corpse that tumbled from a wardrobe at an inconvenient moment for every one concerned. In reality you fall on your two hands, which you hold stiffly out just above your waist a moment before you touch the ground, but, done properly, it looks as though you had pitched headlong.

There was a short pause, while I listened for all I was worth.

"Name of a name," muttered a thick voice in my ear. "But what is this?"

I felt rather than saw, that he was stooping over me. Now was the time. My hand shot out, and, grasping the bottom of his trousers, I jerked them upwards with all my force, at the same time throwing myself back. The man gave a cry of surprise, and, his legs being torn from under him, he fell heavily on that part provided by nature for the purpose. He then completed the good work by hitting his head against the edge of the pallet. He lay awkwardly, as he had fallen, without making any further movement or sound.

I scrambled to my feet and made for the door, upsetting the stool as I did so, so that the tray with my lunch which I so sadly needed crashed to the ground. I pulled the door shut. Thank God, the idiot had left his keys in the lock. I secured the door, seized the bundle and bolted for the nearest exit I could see. It brought me to the main office of the *mairie*, which at that time of the day was quite deserted. I threw the keys into the waste-paper basket, fortunately half full, and stopped a second to arrange the papers in it over the top of them. Then I made for the door into the street, looked swiftly

to left and right and walked down the steps, my hands in my pockets, my heart beating twenty to the dozen.

There was nobody in the street — only a knot of workmen drinking at the little tables outside the café opposite; and, going rapidly round the corner of the building, I found myself once more upon the road which led to the mill.

"Go slowly now," I bade myself, though my desire was to run as fast as I could. "You are just strolling quietly down the village street in your nice new suit."

Excellent advice, but at that moment a sudden hubbub broke out behind me. I was still not more than fifty yards away from the *mairie*. A voice was shouting and there was a sound of heavy blows from within the cell. I could distinguish a few phrases.

"*Au secours*. The bandit has escaped."

Resisting with much difficulty the inclination to flee, I looked negligently back.

The small knot of loafers drinking outside the principal café opposite the *mairie* had already been attracted by the sounds. Two of them were crossing the road. Another was looking in my direction. I saw him speak to one of his companions, who said something in turn to his neighbor. They had not yet connected me with the outcry in the *mairie*, but they were clearly beginning to be interested. Two of them moved away from the iron table at which they had been sitting and began to walk towards me along the road. This was no moment to linger, but to take to my heels might be even worse. I therefore walked rapidly down the road, becoming aware as I did so, that my tendon, where Marie

had bitten it, was giving me considerable pain and that I was already going lame.

The hue and cry would be up in a moment and I was in no condition for a cross-country effort. I must continue in some way to cover my tracks. But how was that to be done?

With these thoughts going round in my head, I turned a corner, which for the moment cut me off from my pursuers. Immediately to my left was a house, or rather two houses, of the semidetached type, in process of construction. The bare shells rose from a litter of rubble, planks, mortar and other building material; and there, just beside me, was a long ladder, the summit of which was lost in a maze of scaffolding and half-finished walls. Some ten or fifteen yards away from the houses reclined or sat a number of workmen under a group of trees beside the road. Some of them were eating their midday meal while the others were beginning to sleep it off. Propped against the ladder stood a large hod of bricks, presumably set down with the extreme promptitude of the workingman at the sound of the whistle. I took in all this at a glance, just as round the corner there came the patter of running steps and voices raised in excitement.

The hunt was up. In a moment my pursuers would be upon me and I should be caught between them and the workmen taking their ease.

I picked up the hod of bricks and began to climb the ladder, just as the first of my pursuers appeared upon the road.

I continued to climb the ladder, calmly and, as I hoped, inconspicuously. On reaching the summit, I

found myself upon a small platform which ran between the walls of the house. I took cover, set down the hod and waited.

From round the corner of the unfinished wall, I had an excellent view. The three men from the café had reached the workmen under the trees. Questions were asked and answered with much gesticulation, and miraculously, from the village, a small crowd was beginning to collect. Suddenly, round the same corner came no less a person than the *commissaire* himself, accompanied by the man I had locked into the cell. Both were hatless and very red in the face. Every one below was soon talking, but I couldn't hear a word of what was said. The *commissaire* was very hot, and the people from the village were clearly eager to help him with suggestions and advice. But the workmen were hard to move. In the first place they hadn't seen me and in the second this was their hour of repose. The *commissaire* pointed down the road. The workmen shook their heads. The *commissaire* pointed to the village. The workmen again shook their heads. The *commissaire* waved his arms. The workmen shrugged their shoulders. Finally the *commissaire* appeared to give it up. He had a short conference with the men from the café. There was more pointing, shaking of the head, shrugging of the shoulders and waving of the arms. Finally, the whole group from the village including the *commissaire*, returned the way they had come and, disappearing round the corner, left the workmen to digest in peace.

I looked about me.

I could hardly descend the ladder without being noticed by the workmen below, but the platform on

which I stood ran right round the walls of the house and I walked to the side remote from the road. There was no ladder to the ground, but I saw that it was an easy matter to descend by means of the scaffolding. I should be covered by the house in doing so and by making a *détour* could regain the road beyond the spot where the workmen were resting. I should thus be able to make the mill and, if nothing better occurred to me, lie hidden until the return of Diana and Carstairs from Marseilles. Then, somehow, we must contrive to warn the British Consul. You may be surprised and I hope you will be touched by my faith in the British Consul. But he was now our only hope and, for the moment, I refused to contemplate what would happen if we failed to convince him of our need.

Cautiously, I climbed down the scaffolding. On reaching the ground I found myself well away from the road in what would at some future date be the back yard of the unfinished house. There I took to the open country, and, discovering a friendly stretch of vines, was soon moving through the welcome cover which they offered.

The mill, as you may remember, was about three kilometres away. I didn't dare take to the road, but kept some hundreds of yards to the side, walking furtively round the edges of fields and taking advantage of every bit of cover I could find. The journey accordingly took some time, especially as the cover was far from plentiful. Hedges, except the big cypress barriers against the *mistral*, are rare in Provence.

On reaching the mill — it was now about three o'clock in the afternoon — I hesitated whether to approach it openly. I was known at the mill and presumably the

police would be making enquiries. I therefore lay up for a while among the scrub on the banks of the Gardon, watching for some sign that might give me a lead.

Nothing happened, however. There was no sign of life inside or outside the house. I was now nearly fainting with hunger and I at last decided to take a risk. I walked cautiously into the porch, and, after listening carefully and hearing nothing, I tried the door. It was locked. I next shuffled along the wall to the corner of the house, whence I had a glimpse of the barn on the other side of the road. And then I received a surprise.

The Rolls was standing in the barn.

So David and Diana had returned. My first feeling was thankfulness and my second was anxiety. Diana and David had returned, but why was there no sign of their presence? Why was the house locked?

I moved along the wall which led to the mill wheel. On my right the great aqueduct, yellow in the afternoon light, rose majestically. The day was still very hot and the flies were troublesome.

I soon realised, on reaching the mill wheel, that there was no method of getting into the house that way. All the windows on the ground floor were closed and shuttered.

I retraced my steps, passing once more in front of the porch and so to the other side of the house. There I followed the little path which ran from a chicken run round a corner of the house, into the little courtyard with its one side open to the river. I tried the back door. That too was locked. I stepped back a pace or

two and surveyed the upper windows. They were all closed except one, which was broken and covered with cobwebs.

I remembered that I had seen a ladder near the chicken run. I went back along the path, found the ladder, and, with some difficulty, for it was rather heavy, dragged it back into the courtyard and propped it up against the wall.

"Forcible entry," I murmured, remembering the *commissaire.*

Fortunately the ladder was long enough. I climbed up, put my hand through the broken pane, undid the latch and stood a moment later in an attic, very dusty and covered with cobwebs, but, as far as I could see, quite empty except for a few boxes and crates. I made for the door, and, dragging it open, found myself on a small attic landing, with the stairs some twenty feet away. I walked down them slowly, trying to recollect the whereabouts of the bedroom which Granby and I had shared.

I got safely to the main landing and began to walk slowly along it, wondering which was the door of my room.

The house was deadly quiet. Had they, I suddenly began to wonder, yet buried the miller? Or was he still lying perhaps between burning candles, screwed up in his coffin, in the room beneath my feet?

I turned abruptly. It was stupid to stand there full of morbid fancies. There was clearly no one in the house and I was, as I have said, very hungry. I decided to go down and raid the larder. Then perhaps I would take a dip in the Gardon, find my room, change my

clothes and thus at any rate put myself in train to face the world.

I had not got two or three steps down the stairs when a sharp crack, as of a board snapping, caused me to look round. There was nothing to be seen. The corridor stretched empty away from the head of the staircase to the far wall, dirty and uncarpeted, with the doors of the bedrooms fast shut on either side. I felt suddenly uneasy. The house, so silent and prompting so many questions to which I could find no answer, seemed all at once to be sinister. I stood a moment, my hair tingling, and as I did so, the noise came again.

I found that it proceeded from a large oak wardrobe at the end of the corridor facing me. It was a massive piece of furniture, some three hundred years old and, even as I stared at it, one of the great doors shook and opened a little.

It wasn't nice. I'd had enough of it. I couldn't stand any more.

But I was not to be spared. Out of the crack of the door came a hand, thin and white, save where it was streaked with red. It groped a moment, like a blind thing. Then, on sluggish hinges, the doors of the press swung open and the huddled body of a man fell heavily forward on its hands and knees.

CHAPTER XIII

I IMPERSONATE A GHOST

I stepped swiftly forward and then, as abruptly, paused in sheer astonishment. I was now within a yard of the man on the floor and he had raised himself painfully on one hand. His clothes were torn and he had been roughly handled. His face was white and streaked with blood. But the eyes and the face I knew only too well.

"Thank God, you have turned up, old boy!" said Carstairs in a weak voice, and collapsed in a dead faint at my feet.

Here at least was an end to the vague tremors of a moment ago. This at last was something definite.

Carstairs lay where he had collapsed, dying or perhaps dead! I dropped on my knees beside him and lifted him by the shoulders. As I touched him, to my immense relief, he moved and sighed a little. Then a strong shudder shook his long body.

"David," I said urgently, "what is the matter? What has happened?"

"I shall be better in a minute," he said. "Don't seem to be quite on the spot."

His head fell forward.

"The beds in this pub are pretty poor," he murmured.

I raised him as gently as I could by the shoulders and, pulling him across the floor, propped him up against the wall.

"Listen, old boy," I said, "I am going to find you something to drink."

"Good!" whispered Carstairs. "But don't shake the bottle when you draw the cork."

I moved with all speed downstairs, entering first the *salon* and then, by mistake, the room in which the dead miller had lain in his coffin. He was no longer there, but the place still smelt of flowers and candle wax.

Finally I found the kitchen, but there was no brandy to be discovered anywhere. I therefore drew some red wine from a great cask into a green earthenware jug. On the table was some bread and the remains of one of those soft powerful cheeses they make in that part of the world. I took the bread and cheese, the pitcher of wine and some glasses, put them on a wooden tray and carried them upstairs, setting them down on the floor beside David, who, I rejoiced to note, seemed to be taking a more intelligent interest in life. He was rubbing the back of his neck tenderly.

I poured him out a glass of wine, which he drank at a gulp.

"That's better," he said, in a firmer voice.

Then he looked at me quizzically.

"Lord, Geoffrey," he exclaimed, "what have you been doing with yourself? There isn't a club in London you could enter in that suit — not even mine!"

"If you're really feeling better," I replied, between mouthfuls of bread and cheese, "perhaps you'll tell me what has been happening here."

Carstairs finished a second glass of wine and then, despite my protests, got unsteadily to his feet.

"Are you really all right?" I asked him anxiously.

"No, of course I'm not. But I shall feel a bit better if we can find a couple of chairs."

I pushed open the nearest door. It led to the room where Granby and I had slept two nights before. I took David by the arm and, entering the room, we sat down side by side on the nearest bed. There was a moment's silence.

My mind was working again.

"Where is Diana?" I asked abruptly.

Carstairs looked at me and I could see that the news would be bad. I felt his hand on my knee.

"Just so, Geoffrey," he answered. "They have got Diana."

His thin face was close to mine, the pain in his eyes was terrible to see.

"All right, old boy," I said, after a pause. "It's no use giving way. I am sure you did your best."

"I did what I could," he responded. "But there were half a dozen of them — black brawny niggers. I had better tell you everything from the start, though we haven't much time. Those chaps will be coming back soon, sure as fate."

"Why should they come back?" I asked. "They have got Diana and they've got Granby. What more do they want?"

"My dead body, of course," he answered promptly. "They abandoned it just now for some reason in a frantic hurry. But they are hardly likely to leave it shut in a cupboard for Mrs. Miller to find on her return from Nîmes. Enter Executioners with a Coffin, Cords and a Bell. But listen.

"After leaving you at the crossroads, Diana and I

made straight for Marseilles. We got there yesterday afternoon about three. The Consul had not yet returned. We waited about for him all the afternoon, but he didn't come to his office and we at last ran him to ground at a dinner party about ten o'clock that night. I must say that when we *did* find him, he was most obliging. I gave him Granby's note and told him the tale. I could see at once that he knew all about Granby. He stood to attention all right and will do everything he can. Meanwhile he has wired to London for the codes."

Here Carstairs paused and drank some more wine.

"Well," he continued, "it was a bit late to start back last night, so we put up at a hotel and came back here early this morning. We arrived about eight and put the car in the barn in accordance with Granby's instructions. Then we enquired for you. Madame Seguin told us that you had gone out with the Colonel the night before, that you had returned for a moment this morning and immediately afterwards had disappeared. As you may imagine, Diana was a bit fluttered by this information and I was far from liking it myself, especially as Mrs. Miller was not at all inclined to be chatty. She was, in fact, oddly excited about something or other and informed us that she and Rose were going off to Nîmes as soon as possible to see a lawyer. Robert Seguin had, apparently unbeknownst to them, insured his life for quite a large sum — a hundred thousand francs or something of the kind; and they were going off to look into the matter, the old lady because her signature would be necessary and Rose because she regards her mother as a kind of imbecile. They had no objection,

however, to our waiting here for you. So we waved them farewell and sat down in the parlour to have a council of war."

He paused a moment.

"That was our mistake," he added.

"You mean?" I asked.

"We ought to have left the place at once — gone to Nîmes with them, or buzzed off to Avignon or Timbuctoo or anywhere rather than have waited here. However, it's easy enough to be wise after the event. But I failed to smell the very obvious device."

"Where was the catch?" I asked.

"Well, was it likely," he rejoined, "that the miller had insured his life for that big sum and never told his wife a word about it? The whole thing was clearly a stratagem. Mrs. Miller and her daughter were lured deliberately from the scene, and only too soon we had a proof of it. We sat, I suppose, in the parlour for about half an hour, discussing the position. Diana wanted to go up to the château and I wanted to get hold of Bosanquet. We hadn't quite decided what to do and I was just getting up from the table at which we had been sitting, when it happened."

"What happened?" I asked.

"I saw a fellow at the window," he answered. "One of your precious Negroes. I moved towards him, thinking he had come, perhaps, with some sort of message, when I heard a step behind me and a gasp from Diana. I turned round and there was another of them, in the middle of the room — a big black fellow in white ducks."

"Archimedes," I said,

"He didn't tell me his name," rejoined Carstairs. "He bowed, grinning from ear to ear, and asked us to come along. His master, the count, desired to see us. I didn't at all like the look of him and I began to parley — asked why we were being sent for and all that sort of thing. He was very civil. He explained that you and Granby were staying at the château and that the Count de Vallantré wanted to complete the party. But I didn't like it and I told the fellow that we wouldn't come with him. Then his grin vanished. It was like switching off the electric light. 'You will be pleased to come at once,' he said. This annoyed me and I told him to clear out. For answer he laid a hand on Diana's arm."

I drew a quick breath.

"Yes," said David, "that was where I made my mistake. I just let out and caught him a clip under the ear. It was a silly thing to do, I admit, but I think you will understand."

"And then I suppose he — he overpowered you?" I said.

"You may say so," replied Carstairs. "As a white hope, old boy, I am not in it. He just picked me up and used me like a dumb-bell. Then he slung me half across the room and through the window. That was where I got this cut," he added, pointing to his wrist. "I fell headlong into a bush and tried to get up. But there were more of them outside and the next thing I remember was waking up in the dark and feeling very sick."

"In the cupboard," I suggested.

Carstairs nodded.

"I kept quiet for a moment, trying to remember things, and then I heard footsteps in the corridor and

found strength enough to push open the door. I don't know what I expected to see. But luckily it was you."

We sat silent for a moment. I would rather not describe my thoughts.

"What I don't understand," I said presently, "is why they took Diana to the château and left you behind."

"They left me for dead," said Carstairs. "I'm pretty sure of that. And I'm equally sure that they will come back, to dispose of the body, unless, of course, they have arranged for Mrs. Miller and her daughter never to return."

I got up from the bed and walked gloomily to the shuttered window. I took one look into the road outside and drew hastily back.

"You are right, David," I said. "They are coming back."

He rose and stood beside me. Two of the Negroes were walking down the road towards the mill and I caught sight of another woolly head a little further behind them. The two on the road were about fifty yards away, carrying spades.

"Hell," said Carstairs, "what are we to do? Are you armed?"

I put my hand to my pocket.

"No," I said. I had been deprived of the automatic which Granby had given me at the police station that morning.

"That's bad," said Carstairs.

"Look here, David," I said. "They have come back here to bury you, but you must get away and warn Bosanquet at Marseilles. Is that clear?"

"That's the way to talk," he said. "I just totter forth, knock out Archimedes while you take on the rest of them single-handed. We then drive off to Marseilles, arriving just in time for dinner."

He laughed, but his face was bloodless and he was holding himself erect by means of the shutter.

"David," I continued fiercely, "listen to this. Archimedes has come for you, but he will forget all about your dead body when he sees me here. He has been after me most of the night and at the mere sight of me the whole lot of them will give tongue. Very well, then, I shall take jolly good care that they do not see me. Meanwhile you are going to slip off, get into the Rolls and drive straight to the nearest telephone. If you can't get Bosanquet on the wire, you must go on to Marseilles. Tell him everything. They've got Granby at the château; they've got Diana; and in a few minutes they will have got me."

Carstairs looked a little bewildered.

"What will happen to you?" he asked.

"I shall join Granby and Diana at the château — that is all," I said. "But that won't matter if one of us gets away. Can you do it, David? Do you feel fit enough?"

"I'm fit enough," said Carstairs uncertainly.

As he spoke, the sound of a key turning in the lock echoed through the silent house.

"They're breaking in," he continued. "It's too late anyway."

"No it isn't," I replied. "I got in myself through an attic window and please God the ladder that I used is still there. Come with me."

Slipping out of the room, we moved as quietly as we could along the passage and up the attic stairs. The ladder was still in place.

I caught Carstairs by the arm.

"Can you do it?" I asked.

He looked at me a moment. Then suddenly he made up his mind.

"Very well, Geoffrey," he said. "Here goes. I'll get away with it all right. I could drive the Rolls in my sleep. You may expect all the king's horses and all the king's men by to-morrow morning at the latest."

He spoke gaily enough, but his face was white and drawn and I could see that every movement was giving him great pain. I helped him to squeeze through the little window and to get his feet on to the ladder. Then he began slowly to climb down.

I waited for no more, but turned to my own part in the affair. Somehow I must continue to draw off the pursuit for long enough to enable him to slip away in the car unobserved. I ran down the attic stairs to the landing of the first floor. Voices speaking an unknown tongue came up from the floor below, followed by the creak of a stair and a soft shuffling of feet. I slipped back along the passage, noticing, as I did so, that the cupboard in which they had thrust Carstairs was still open. It was a large press, so spacious that even Carstairs, tall though he was, would have been put to no inconvenience inside it. High up inside was a shelf piled with linen sheets and pillow cases.

I had a sudden idea. The Negroes were coming to look for a dead man. They were superstitious and should be easily startled.

I slipped hastily into the press just as one of them emerged from the head of the stairs. Luckily the man was in no hurry. Watching him through a crack in the door, I saw him stop at sight of the pitcher of red wine which Carstairs and I had left lying on the floor. He retrieved the pitcher and began to drink, clearly delighted at this unexpected boon. I reached quickly above my head, seized a sheet, and draped it over my shoulders. I next took one of the pillow slips. It was old and had one or two holes in it. These I enlarged and pulled the slip over my head, so that it provided me with a rough mask. Then I waited and watched.

The Negro had meanwhile been joined by one of his companions. They finished the pitcher of wine and advanced, chattering volubly, along the corridor. I waited till they were within six feet of the press, then, pushing both doors wide open, fluttered out, waving my shrouded arms and uttering a falsetto howl.

The effect exceeded my wildest expectations. With a scream of terror one of the Negroes turned back to the stairs and fled, while the other fell on his knees and began to implore strange gods to save him. Giving tongue once more, I flapped my way down the passage, and reaching the stairs, began to descend them. Would my resurrection of the ghost of Carstairs hold till I could get to the door?

An excited jabbering greeted me as I turned a corner of the staircase, followed by a loud yell of terror. I paused, drew myself up majestically, and took a stately step forward with hands outstretched. But there, alas, my impersonation ended. My foot caught in a fold of the sheet and before I knew what had happened, I did the

last six stairs in one, landing with a crash on the broad person of Archimedes, who was standing at the bottom. My head encountered him just below the belt, and he gave a gasp like a pair of bellows coming into action.

I tore away the clinging folds of the sheet, which I flung to one side. They fell over another Negro who at that moment, being just behind Archimedes, was called upon to support the huge bulk of his master. He was not equal to the task and I was over them both in an instant. The front door was ajar and I dragged it open.

It was just at that moment that a cloud of dust and the three musical notes of the horn on the Rolls, very sweet in my ears, showed me that Carstairs had got away in the car.

But the hunt was up again and, setting my face towards the aqueduct, I started to run along the road.

The great arches shone a pale gold in the afternoon light. The cool waters of the Gardon chattered among their stones, while I, a desperate fugitive, pounded along the hard white road. But it did not matter now; they could take me when they liked and I should at least know what had happened to Diana.

Already I heard footsteps behind me. Then came a hot breath on the nape of my neck and a black hand clutching my shoulder. At the same instant my heel, which had been giving me great trouble, collapsed altogether. I stumbled and sank to the ground.

"Now, sar," said a voice, still rather short of breath, "are you coming quietly or must I use strong right arm?"

Archimedes was holding me up. I was a child in his grasp.

"As you please," I said feebly. "I can do no more."

The Negro grinned.

"You give us a lot of trouble, sar," he said. "Perhaps I have occasion later to remind you."

A pink tongue came sliding over the thick lips. He pulled out a silver whistle and blew it.

Two other Negroes appeared at the run. Archimedes gave them some kind of order, which I could not understand, with the result that they picked me up and began to carry me on their shoulders. For this I was profoundly grateful, for now that the excitement was over, I could not have walked another step.

I need not describe my passage up the well-remembered path to the château. The sun was setting and, as we emerged from the undergrowth, the tall pillars of the demilune turned black against the flaming sky.

Would they take me to the dovecote? When should I see Diana? Was Granby still holding them at bay? These questions passed vaguely through my mind, which refused to find an answer.

My bearers swung to the left and passed behind the château. There was a pause and I heard the sound of a door opening. We entered. Inside it was very dark. I was being carried down steps. Another door was opened. There was the click of electric light.

I saw that we were in a cellar, bare and desolate, with three or four great casks in one corner, but otherwise empty.

Here my bearers set me down and left me, locking the door behind them.

I was again a prisoner.

But what did it matter? Carstairs was free. Help would be coming with the dawn.

CHAPTER XIV

I ACCEPT A MISSION

Seated on the sandy floor of the cellar, I presumed that I should be left in peace, at any rate for a little while. I was therefore surprised when the door opened again at the end of about ten minutes. Two of the Negro servants appeared. They did not utter a word, being either dumb or unable to speak in any language but their own. They successfully indicated, however, that I was to follow them.

One of them even took me by the arm with a gesture which I think was meant to be helpful, for he noticed that I was limping. We moved along a dark passage, up some stone stairs and along another passage. A door was pushed open and I found myself in a small room of the boudoir type, very beautifully furnished. The walls were hung with Gobelin tapestries, soft greens and blues and greys. The subjects were classical or mythological — Cornelia showing her jewels, two fat and earnest Gracchi, Actæon being torn to pieces by the hounds of Artemis, who cheered them on to the quarry in the middle of a limpid stream, while the whole of one wall was taken up by a great rectangle of tapestry showing all the beasts of the field and of the forest.

There were two or three *bergère* chairs in the room covered with a design of flowers in *petit point* and an inlaid table standing by a marble hearth.

The leading Negro invited me to cross the room, which was empty. I followed him listlessly. He drew aside a curtain, opened a white and gold door and ushered me into the most luxurious bathroom I have ever entered. The bath itself, of green marble, was let into the floor. Round its edge was a mosaic pavement with a design of fishes, sea monsters and nymphs. The walls were painted and the subjects, again, were classical — but more suggestive — Leda and the swan, Zeus and Danaë. Steam rose in light whorls from the water in the bath. The Negroes helped me in silence to take off my hideous clothes. Gratefully, I descended the three green steps into the water. Lying there, I soon began to feel better and even to hope that my anxieties for Diana and my fears for Granby were exaggerated.

The roof of the bathroom I will not describe. It was painted like the walls in antique style, probably by the same hand which had decorated the ballroom of the count. The subjects were unedifying and the execution was perfect.

Presently I was taken from the bath — for the Negroes never left me — laid on a smooth marble slab and competently massaged until I glowed all over. My heel was dressed and soothing ointment applied to my cut lip. I was next clad in silk underclothes and a brown suit which fitted me fairly well. I was then led back to the boudoir, where I was served with a really magnificent dinner, including the partridge stuffed with oysters for which Carstairs had so often hankered in vain. The Romanée which accompanied it left nothing to be desired; nor did the cigar which went with the coffee.

After dinner I lay back in one of the *bergère* chairs

and tried to think. What was happening? Why was I being treated with such consideration? The facts would not supply me with an answer. Granby was a prisoner. Something was going to happen on the fifteenth. Everything was organised. The count was in a few days to gratify to the full his desire for power. Everything was going well.

Then, there was Diana. I started up from the chair and began to walk to and fro over the soft carpet. A terrible thought had come to me. Here I was, surrounded by every luxury, treated like a prince. The Count de Vallantré had got Diana, my wife. What had he said to her? What pressure had he used? Why was he taking the trouble to treat me so well? I found suddenly that I could not bear such thoughts.

Mercifully, at that moment, the door opened. Archimedes, in his panoply of scarlet, stood before me.

"The compliments of Monsieur le Comte," he said. "Will you step this way, sar?"

I followed him without a word. We went down the passage, turned to the right into another corridor, which I recognised as the one through which Granby and I had been led to our interview with Caramac.

The library door was pushed open and, as I entered, the low clear notes of a chiming clock struck the hour of nine.

This, I saw at once, was to be a conference. Seated round the big table in the middle of the room were the four conspirators, if you will allow me so romantic a word. The Count de Vallantré had abandoned his eighteenth-century costume for a modern dinner jacket of black velvet. He was sitting between Caramac in his

invalid chair and General Tanyi. On the further side of Caramac was Richards.

A vacant chair was set opposite them but at a little distance from the table.

"Good evening, Mr. Carroll," said Caramac. He pointed to the empty seat. "I trust you are recovered from the fatigue of the last twenty-four hours," he continued, as I seated myself in obedience to his gesture.

The others looked at me in silence and I, equally dumb, stared back at them. Beyond were the tall windows leading to the garden, with the demilune in the background. The curtains were not drawn and the formal hedges of cypress stood, in clear outline, against the moonlit sky.

The silence deepened. Richards was fiddling with an unlit cigar. General Tanyi, turning the pages of a sheaf of papers, glanced up now and then at the count, who, with flushed face, was gazing moodily at nothing in particular. The count was clearly in no very amiable frame of mind.

"Well, gentlemen," I said at last, "what do you want with me?"

"You are again in a position to help us," said Caramac smoothly.

I raised my eyebrows at that.

"Yes, young man," broke in Richards, "and you may think yourself damn lucky to be asked."

"Well," I answered, looking steadily at Caramac, "what is it you want me to do?"

"Yesterday morning, Mr. Carroll, a little before dawn you and Colonel Granby made a somewhat sen-

sational escape from the dovecote. There you undoubtedly scored a point — especially as Archimedes, afraid to confess his negligence, and hoping to recover you in his own good time, omitted for several hours to inform us of the fact. You were free and we did not know you were free. You were thus in a position to make excellent use of your liberty. Oddly, very oddly indeed, after having successfully escaped from your prison in the early morning, you returned to it in the late evening."

General Tanyi looked up impatiently from his papers.

"To the point, Doctor, if you please," he snapped.

"All in good time, General," responded Caramac quietly. "I want Monsieur Carroll to understand our position."

He turned again to me.

"Fortunately we have discovered the reason for this strange behaviour," he continued. "We have learned that there lies hidden in the dovecote, under the fourteenth stair, some very important information concerning our plans."

He paused and laid a thin white hand on the polished surface of the table.

"Your return to the château can only mean that you, too, have learned — presumably from the miller's postcard — of the existence of this information and of the place where it is hidden. You came here last night with Colonel Granby to secure it. You, Mr. Carroll, got away. Colonel Granby did not."

Caramac paused, and I saw his face, already pale, turn suddenly paler. He raised his hand, shaking slightly, and put it over his heart.

Richards, with a hasty movement, got to his feet, crossed the room and returned with a carafe of water, a glass and a little dark blue phial from which he poured some drops of colourless liquid. Caramac drank with difficulty, but, almost before the glass was set down, a little colour had come back to his cheeks.

"Thank you," he said in a stronger voice.

Meanwhile my mind had been at work. What did they want of me? Why should I be in any way necessary to their plans? My heart gave a sudden jump. Had Granby given them the slip? Was Diana really no longer in their power? Had they somehow failed to reach the fourteenth stair in time?

"The dovecote should not be difficult to search," I observed.

Caramac smiled with lips that were still bloodless.

"Of course," he said. "But Colonel Granby is still unfortunately there and he shows no inclination to receive us. He cannot, of course, get out. But neither can we get in. It is a stalemate, Mr. Carroll, unless you can help us to end a situation which is unsatisfactory to both parties."

There was a singing in my ears. Granby had not been recaptured. He was only besieged. And he had, of course, found the miller's message. But I was still unable to see what they could possibly want with me. Granby had probably secured information which would wreck their plans, whatever they might be. But their plans were laid, as Tanyi had announced, for the fifteenth of October, and it was already the thirteenth. They had only, so far as I could see, to prevent Granby's departure from the dovecote for another two days. Afterwards,

when action had been taken, the information which Granby had secured would be valueless.

Caramac was reading my thoughts and the answer was prompt and sufficient.

"Now, Mr. Carroll," he said, "the position is this. I will put all my cards on the table. I always do. It may become necessary for us to leave this place sooner than we intended."

"That's the worst of these fancy combinations," growled Richards, "go down like a pack of cards. I should have said Trochet was safe for another six months at least."

"Sooner than we intended," repeated Caramac, ignoring the intervention of Richards, which to me seemed at the time entirely irrelevant. "This being so, we cannot afford to leave Colonel Granby behind us in possession of information which may seriously endanger our proceedings. We need to be quite sure either that Colonel Granby has no such information in his possession or that he will not be able to use it until it is too late. That is where you can be of service to us. We have several times tried to get in touch with Colonel Granby, but our advances have so far met with small encouragement. On the last occasion Colonel Granby went so far as to say that anybody who came sufficiently near would — what was the expression, General?" concluded Caramac, turning to Tanyi.

"Get it in the neck," said Tanyi shortly.

"Get it in the neck," repeated Caramac with a pleasant smile.

There was a pause and they all looked at me.

So that was what they wanted. I was to act as an

ambassador, get in touch with Granby, enable them to parley with him and come to terms.

"I see," I said at last, "you want me to persuade Colonel Granby to hand over to you what papers he may have found in the dovecote?"

"Exactly," said Caramac. "We must also have an opportunity of satisfying ourselves that he has taken no copy and that he could not possibly remember what they contained."

"And suppose you cannot be satisfied on all these points," I objected.

"In that case, Colonel Granby must allow himself to be safely isolated until after the fifteenth. Ways and means can be found."

"And if he refuses to do any of these things?"

"Colonel Granby is a faithful friend and you will make it clear to him that unless he complies with our conditions you, Mr. Carroll, will, within a period agreed upon — what was the expression, General?"

"You will get it in the neck, my young friend," said the Count de Vallantré leaning suddenly forward.

"Not a hope," I said firmly. "You can't bluff Colonel Granby as easily as that."

Caramac looked at me steadily and my confidence departed.

"It isn't bluff, Mr. Carroll, and you know it. You will persuade Colonel Granby to do as we require or you will suffer the consequences."

"And if I refuse to undertake this mission?" I asked in a low voice.

"In that case, Mr. Carroll, you may be interested to know what will happen to your wife," he replied.

"My compliments," said the count, "she is a charming creature."

I suddenly found myself leaning across the table. My fist shot out and in another moment I should have caught the count on the point of the jaw, had not my arm been seized by General Tanyi.

"Quietly," he said sharply. "Sit down, Monsieur. Madame is safe and sound. She is in the dovecote with Colonel Granby."

I suffered myself to be pushed back into the chair. My relief was so intense that for the moment it shattered me almost as much as my red rage of an instant before. I looked with gratitude at the little general. But for his friendly incursion Caramac would have repeated upon me the trick which he had used at our last interview. He was looking now at Tanyi, with a gentle air of deprecation.

"General," he said, "your intervention does you credit, but you will pardon me for finding it not a little unseasonable. Don Quixote was an excellent fellow, but he would have made a poor conspirator."

"I see no reason," said the general, and I saw that his eyes were hard, "why we should not conduct ourselves like gentlemen. Circumstances compel us to resort to extreme measures, but there are certain methods to which I cannot consent to be a party. The abduction of Madame Carroll was not in our programme and I had no idea that the Count de Vallantré would compromise my honour by attempting to make off with a lady for his own purposes."

Richards laid a fat hand on the shoulder of the angry little man.

"Come, General," he said, "the lady is safe enough. The count acted entirely on his own initiative. We were none of us a party to his escapade. For heaven's sake let's close the incident and get on with the work."

"An excellent suggestion," broke in Caramac. "You may take it from me, General, that we have no desire to compromise your honour. Your wife, Mr. Carroll, is in the dovecote with Colonel Granby. Had I had my way, she would have been left free and unmolested. The Count de Vallantré, however, took steps to bring her here without our knowledge and he was not successful in keeping her. You will doubtless be told the story in her own good time. The present matter is this: Will you consent to meet Colonel Granby for us by to-morrow morning at nine o'clock latest, or will you take the consequences?"

I had been thinking rapidly and my spirits were high. Somehow Diana had escaped to the dovecote. She was safe, safe with Granby. How she had managed it or what exactly had happened, I did not for the moment know or care. She was safe. Carstairs, moreover, might even now be in touch with Bosanquet. I had only to play for time and the police would rescue us all. I assumed a look of surly acquiescence.

"What exactly do you offer us in return for the papers?" I asked.

"You shall join Colonel Granby in the dovecote and remain there till we leave the château," Caramac replied. "You will not, however, be molested. We shall all, in fact, be safe from one another."

"You have got me, gentlemen," I said. "Have I, indeed, any choice in the matter? I will see Colonel Granby

as you desire, though I cannot of course guarantee that he will give me the papers."

Caramac smiled.

"I think you will be able to persuade him — with our assistance," he answered softly.

But I scarcely heard what he said. I was looking beyond him, through the window to the moonlit garden.

I had only to play for time and the police would rescue us all.

I had played and I had lost.

Two Negro servants, in their gorgeous liveries, were passing. They carried between them a stretcher and upon it lay the motionless form of David Carstairs.

CHAPTER XV

I MOUNT THE SCAFFOLD

But Caramac was speaking. His voice came as from a distance.

"I'm glad you have decided to help us," he was saying. "We will discuss the details later when our arrangements are more complete."

He raised his slim hand in a gesture of dismissal.

I scarcely remember how I reached the door or how exactly I got back to the rooms in which I had been installed. There was a picture hanging beside one of the tapestries — a scene by Watteau, of lords and ladies playing at simplicity. It was crooked. I adjusted it. A bronze satyr stood awry upon the mantelpiece. I pushed it into place.

Meanwhile two Negro footmen had appeared. They were bowing and making signs. They apparently desired to help in my undressing.

I turned on them swiftly.

"Get out," I said. "Get out, damn you!"

The footmen disappeared.

What had happened to David? That was the thing that mattered. How had he come to be carried inanimate — perhaps dead — past the windows of the library? I had heard him drive off safely in the car. How had Archimedes and his crew contrived to lay their hands upon him?

I moved from my preposterous sitting room into the bedroom adjoining and found myself vaguely inspecting a huge bed shaped like an oyster shell and lined with white satin. Heavy curtains of yellow silk covered the walls. The ceiling, painted in the style of Tiepolo, was gay with nymphs and goddesses.

On the bed lay a pair of pyjamas of pale green silk, and I began listlessly to undress. There came a rustle and stir among the curtains. A girl was smiling down upon me, a fixed meaningless smile. Her bare arms, rising from a thin garment of mauve, were stretched above her head in a studied pose.

I looked at her a moment in silence. Her face was somehow familiar.

"Yes," she said, "Monsieur has seen me before."

Now I remembered. This was Aspasia, the girl who had helped me in the ballroom on my first visit to the château.

"Monsieur," she continued, "has everything he needs?"

As she spoke she moved lightly across the room and sat down on the edge of the bed.

"Everything," I answered shortly.

"*Eh bien,*" she said, "it is just as well."

She moved across the room, light as thistledown. Already her hands were upon the curtain.

"One moment," I said. "I do not mean to be rude. You came here by order of the count?"

"The count is generous," said the girl. "One pleases him if it is not impossible."

"We may perhaps drink together," I suggested.

I wanted to detain her somehow.

She smiled.

"That is easy, Monsieur," she replied, and, slipping quickly behind the curtains, she returned very shortly with a tray upon which stood the inevitable bottle of champagne.

She sat down and took the glass I poured out for her. I moved back to the edge of the bed.

"A droll situation, is it not?" she murmured.

Sitting in that fantastic boudoir, drinking champagne with a lady for whose company I had no desire, while my wife and best friend were desperately besieged a few hundred yards away, I was inclined to agree with her.

"So you come from the count," I said again.

"The count is a generous host. He forgets nothing. Monsieur will admit that his hospitality is . . . comprehensive."

She made a large gesture that embraced the room with all it contained, including her own rather obvious charms.

"Tell me about the château," I suggested. "How does one pass the time?"

She shook her head.

"You will find it difficult, Monsieur," she said, "to buy my confidence with a glass of champagne — especially since it is the count who pays for it."

She rose as she spoke.

"Mademoiselle," I said. "I am sorry if I offended you."

She looked at me over her shoulder.

"There is no offence," she replied. "But ask me nothing. I will say only this. The count is as the fancy takes

him. He cannot bear to be crossed and to-night he is in a bad mood. Not even Marie can do anything with him."

She looked at me uncertainly a moment and then bending suddenly forward murmured almost into my ear.

"Monsieur may be thankful that his wife is in the dovecote with the English colonel."

She rose swiftly to her full height and disappeared abruptly behind the curtain, leaving me gazing at the derelict bottle of champagne.

It would be wrong to say that I did not sleep at all that night. But never, I imagine, had so soft a bed so singularly failed of its purpose. I lay there for hour after hour, dozing by fits and starts, turning miserably from side to side. I tried to rivet my mind to the one element of hope in our desperate position. For some reason or other the count could not wait indefinitely at the château. But this was but a small and vague consolation. He might still wait long enough. Meanwhile on the following morning I was to be used as an ambassador. Pressure would be put upon my friend Granby by Caramac and the rest of them and it was not difficult to imagine the form it would take. They would use me to get what they wanted.

For one thing I was profoundly thankful. They might, but for some bold or lucky intervention of Granby, have been using Diana instead. She, at any rate, was safe and I was spared the torment of believing her to be in their clutches. I had to thank Tanyi for that. The little man had somewhere a sense of honour and fair dealing and if it ever came to a final settle-

ment with these men I would remember it in his favour.

Nature at last had her way and at about four in the morning I fell into an uneasy sleep which lasted until I was roused by Archimedes and two of his men at about half-past eight. I was given half an hour to dress and coffee was served in the sitting room. I was then invited by Archimedes to follow him into the garden.

My attention was first directed to the group gathered about the demilune — Caramac, seated in his invalid chair, the count, General Tanyi and Richards standing beside him. But my eyes were quickly drawn elsewhere, to an object which for an instant puzzled me. The instant passed and I felt the roof of my mouth go dry. There could be no doubt of it, and a sudden weakness caught me at the pit of the stomach.

To the right of the demilune, fully in view of the dovecote, some three hundred yards away, stood a strange erection. It consisted of three beams, two upright and one athwart. They were of unpainted wood and garnished fantastically with wreaths of flowers, red and white roses and ivy twisted about them. From the beam that crossed the two vertical supports hung a lean rope with a noose at the end of it.

"Yes, Mr. Carroll," came the voice of Caramac, "that is a gallows. I'm sorry to be so suggestive, but it is essential that your friend Colonel Granby should be impressed."

I looked away to the dovecote. Was that Granby up there upon the roof? Something, at least, had moved. What did he make of it all, I wondered.

Caramac turned to General Tanyi.

"What is the protocol, General? You are the expert."

Tanyi drew nearer to Caramac and they talked together in low tones. Meanwhile I was free to look about me. The dovecote, three hundred yards away, glowed a dull red in the morning light, the holes in the sides of it looking like scales on the body of a fish. Several pigeons were circling in the morning air, their bodies white against the clear Provençal sky. On my right was the château with its roses and nymphs, its garlands and satyrs and mythological beasts, and, a few yards away, the quiet pool with its Venus. How fantastic it all was, and most fantastic of all were the men about me — Tanyi with his lean face and broad bushy eyebrows, short and spare in the sunlight; the count with his restless eyes and athletic form, grown soft; Richards, with his easy smile and city ways; and last, but not least, the indomitable Caramac in his chair, the dark rug about his wasted knees, with nothing alive in his face except the implacable eyes.

What was holding together these men, so strangely assorted? What was the League of Discontent in which they found a common aim? Tanyi had shown himself to be a decent fellow. There might be limits to what he would allow. Nevertheless . . . I looked away to the sinister erection of beams in front of the dovecote. He was, it seemed, prepared if necessary to go as far as that.

I drew myself up and swallowed hard as Tanyi came towards me. He had in his hand, I now perceived, a large white handkerchief. Motioning me to follow him, he stepped towards the dovecote.

"Mr. Carroll," he said as we advanced, "please understand that we cannot allow you in any circumstances to escape. You are covered by my men and if you make the slightest movement for which we are unprepared, you will be shot."

We stood together now in the open. Immediately in front of us was the dovecote. Behind us, out of range, stood the gallows. General Tanyi lifted the handkerchief and waved it above his head.

The seconds passed. I heard voices behind me.

"There he is," exclaimed Richards.

"Watch that door," came the voice of the count.

But we had seen him already for ourselves. The door in the dovecote had opened, and the next moment a slight figure appeared upon the threshold. Even at that distance I had no difficulty in recognising Granby. He stood a moment motionless in the strong Provençal sunlight. Something in his right hand was gleaming and I perceived that he held his automatic pistol ready.

He took a pace or two forward. He also held in his left hand a white handkerchief.

Tanyi went confidently to meet him and I walked beside him. Granby waited for us a few yards from the dovecote. Five yards from Granby we halted and there was a short pause. Granby's face was expressionless.

"Colonel Granby," said Tanyi, "we are here to treat with you and I give you my word that the . . . er . . . truce will be respected."

Tanyi, as he spoke, looked significantly at the pistol in Granby's hand. The two men stared very directly at one another for a moment.

"Thank you, General," answered Granby, "I will hear what you have to say."

"Mr. Carroll will explain what we require. I am bound to warn you, however, that should you refuse our terms the consequences for him will be serious."

He glanced as he spoke over his shoulder to the gallows behind us.

Granby looked in the same direction and his face became even more expressionless than before.

"I understand you, General," he said. "Either I accept your honourable terms or you will honourably hang my poor friend on the gibbet yonder. Is that the proposition?"

Tanyi flushed.

"There is more at stake, Colonel Granby, than the life of any one of us here. I regret the position in which we find ourselves, but we must use such means as we have at our disposal. I can assure you that I feel no personal animosity towards Mr. Carroll."

"I'm glad of that," said Granby, still with that face of steel. "It will be a great comfort to me and to the lady who is at present in my protection to realise that you are hanging Mr. Carroll in the friendliest spirit."

He turned quickly to me.

"Now, Geoffrey," he said, "what are the terms?"

I found myself explaining the position to him in a curiously impersonal way. I did not know this Granby of the iron mask. He might have been a stranger.

I outlined to him briefly the proposal of Caramac. He listened attentively but I watched in vain for any indication of what he was feeling or thinking about it. When I had finished, he turned to Tanyi.

"Will it," he asked, "be in order if I ascertain from Mr. Carroll exactly how we stand?"

"Mr. Carroll," Tanyi replied, "is at liberty to answer any questions you may wish to put to him."

"One question only," said Granby. "Is he your only prisoner?"

"No," I broke in. "They've got Carstairs as well."

"You cannot expect to be relieved, if that is what you mean," said the General.

"But you may find it necessary to . . . er . . . raise the siege," said Granby.

"That is so," replied the general. "Hence these proceedings and hence the position in which Mr. Carroll finds himself."

"My terms are these," said Granby.

His tone was icy. It was not the voice of a man who meant to compromise. But I was leaving it to him and heaven knows I had no wish to give in.

"No," I muttered, "I'll be hanged if I do."

Quite suddenly it occurred to me that I should quite literally be hanged if I did not. Did Granby realise it yet? Perhaps I ought to mention this fact.

But what was Granby saying? My heart gave a sudden leap.

"It is true," he admitted, "that I have found the miller's message. It is in cipher and I am unable to read it. I accept your conditions. Mr. Carroll will join me in the dovecote, so will Mr. Carstairs. You will allow us provisions for three days. You will maintain the siege for so long as you remain in the château but you will restrict your operations to preventing our escape."

Tanyi was looking better now and was obviously

pleased at the turn events were taking. I give him credit for that. He did not want to hang me if it could be avoided. He was even wiping his forehead with the flag of truce, being in a sweat on my account, which was rather decent of him.

"Thank you, Colonel Granby," he said. "I'm glad you realise the position. You are, I understand, prepared to surrender the document. The other details can quite easily be arranged."

"Details?" said Granby, and the thin mouth shut like a trap.

"We must of course be allowed to satisfy ourselves that no copy of the document remains in your possession," said Tanyi. "But that will be quite a simple matter. I will accompany you to the dovecote and supervise the search."

"Search," said Granby. His voice faltered and I looked at him in dismay. He had apparently not understood that the dovecote would have to be searched and his change of manner could only bear one interpretation. These last two days had been too much even for his self-control and he had given the show away. Somewhere in the dovecote he had concealed a copy of the document.

Tanyi had not failed to notice the change. He looked steadily at Granby who, rather less steadily, avoided his gaze.

"It is a mere formality," said Tanyi.

"You presume to doubt my good faith?" responded Granby. There was a suspicion of bluster in his tone and he looked, I am sorry to confess, the picture of guilt.

"We cannot afford to take any risk in this matter," said Tanyi. "I thought Mr. Carroll had made that clear. We must be sure that you have neither memorised nor copied the document which you are handing over to us."

There was a short silence. Granby would look neither at me nor at Tanyi. He had gone suddenly to pieces.

"I'm sorry," he said at last. "I've stated my terms. I will hand over the document."

He drew from his pocket a small green envelope, dusty and rather crumpled, which he handed eagerly, too eagerly, to Tanyi.

"Here are the papers," he said. "Confidence for confidence, General. I have fulfilled my part of the bargain. I now look to you to fulfill yours."

I stared at him in amazement. Surely he must realise that his readiness to hand over the document could only confirm the suspicion that he had taken a copy?

Tanyi drew from the envelope and unfolded a large sheet of flimsy paper. It was, as I could see, covered with figures, obviously a cipher. Tanyi looked at it a moment, refolded it, returned it to the envelope and handed it back to Granby.

"I'm sorry, Colonel," he said. "But you don't seem to realise the position. This document is of no use to us. We merely wish to be sure that it will be of no use to you. It is a paper which no one could possibly commit to memory, but a copy might easily be taken and your conduct during this interview, if I may venture to say so, leads me inevitably to suspect that such is the case. You will therefore either accept our terms in full or —"

He broke off and looked significantly at me.

"Need I continue?" he said abruptly.

"Impossible," muttered Granby. "You would not dare to do it."

General Tanyi turned to me.

"Mr. Carroll," he said, "you can perhaps convince your friend that we honestly mean to carry out our intentions."

I moistened my lips.

"Granby," I said, "do as you think fit. But I really believe that these men, unless you accept their terms, will stop at nothing. You know Caramac. The count is a madman. Richards cannot help himself and General Tanyi here is, I feel sure, inflexible. It isn't bluff, Granby. I wish I could think it was."

Granby looked me straight in the face. What was he trying to tell me?

"They will never hang you, Geoffrey," was what he said.

There was a faint click beside me. The little general had snapped his heels together and was standing very stiff, confronting Granby with an odd suggestion of formality.

"I am to understand, Colonel Granby," he said, "that you reject our offer."

"I am prepared to hand over the document," answered Granby. "But I can go no further."

Tanyi turned to me.

"The conference, Mr. Carroll, is at an end. Colonel Granby will return to the dovecote and you will accompany me to the demilune. We remain under cover of truce until both parties are as they were. I would re-

mind Colonel Granby" — and he glanced at the pistol in Granby's hand as he spoke — "that the armistice is for the moment to his advantage. We stand well within range of my men who are posted in the garden. I have only to add, Colonel Granby, that should you change your mind, a white handkerchief waved from the dovecote will receive our immediate attention. Now, Mr. Carroll, would you mind?"

He beckoned me towards the château. I looked at Granby, who stood with his eyes fixed moodily upon the ground. Did he realise what was about to happen? I had a mad impulse to speak to him urgently, make some final appeal, get him to face the situation as I should be facing it in a few brief moments. The impulse passed. I was mortally afraid and it was my fear, oddly enough, that prevented me from speaking. It was waiting to spring at me and I knew that if I said one word or made the smallest movement towards him I might in an instant be grovelling.

I turned to go and saw, as I faced about, the gibbet with its roses and the watching group by the demilune. Behind me came a sound of footsteps, some that followed me, and another pair that fell more faintly as they retreated.

That was Granby. He would be back in the dovecote by the time I reached the group by the demilune.

Caramac was waiting in his chair. Beside him was Archimedes with two Negroes in attendance. A little further back Richards was in conversation with the Count de Vallantré.

Caramac leaned forward as we approached.

"Well?" he asked.

Tanyi shook his head.

"Colonel Granby," he said, "has offered to give us the document but refuses to allow a search."

Caramac pressed his thin lips together.

"In other words, he has taken a copy."

Tanyi nodded.

"You made the situation perfectly clear to him?"

"I did. He prefers to believe that we dare not proceed."

Caramac sat back and gripped the elbows of his chair.

"Then we must convince him of our good faith," he answered. "Colonel Granby understands, I take it, that he is still permitted to change his mind?"

"I told him that, if he wishes to stop our proceedings, he has only to signal to us from the dovecote."

"Then it would be foolish to waste further time," said Caramac.

He signed as he spoke to the two Negroes beside him.

I had begun to follow as a spectator the brief conversation between Tanyi and Caramac. I could not really believe consecutively even now that I was intimately concerned. My awakening was sudden and complete.

The two Negroes moved forward and seized me by the arms. I lashed out in vain with hands and feet, but was held by the pair of them, while Archimedes, coming with a piece of thin cord, pinioned my arms behind me. I was facing Richards when the work was done and I saw him turn a little white. The count on the contrary, was flushed and breathing heavily. There was an odd, excited gleam in his eyes.

I was hustled forward. Tanyi walked beside me and I was aware of the others behind my back following every detail of the scene.

I was standing now beneath the gallows and facing the dovecote. Granby had insisted it was bluff. But Granby was not his usual self. His wits were all abroad. No use relying on him any more.

I was seized by the Negroes and hoisted upon the shoulders of Archimedes. Something struck me in the face and I felt a slight constriction in the throat.

The noose had been slipped over my head and I felt it tighten about my neck.

I looked about me. Everything stood out very clear, sharp with the bitterness of death. Below me were the count and the general, a few paces to the right, looking up at me curiously. Richards, his face very white, his mouth working, was behind them and, even as I looked, he turned his head away. Caramac in his chair, which had been pushed up close to the gallows, was looking not at me but at the dovecote. I followed his gaze, but everything that I now saw swam in a thick mist. The noose about my neck weighed heavy as lead. Did Granby still believe that this was bluff? He would realise his mistake perhaps when he saw me kicking and jerking at the end of the rope. And Diana was over there, too, in the dovecote. . . . Diana . . . that brought it home. In a few moments now I should be such a thing as she must shrink from in horror.

There was a slight click.

"I have a stop watch in my hand," came the voice of Caramac. "I propose to give Colonel Granby another two minutes. If no movement is perceptible from the

dovecote within that time, Archimedes will step smartly backwards some five or six paces."

Granby, perhaps, had said nothing to Diana. Possibly he did not really think it was bluff at all. He was just obstinate, damned obstinate — refused to give in — would see me hanged first.

That was all very well, but would he feel the same about it if he were in my place, waiting for Archimedes to thrust him into the air? Heroic, of course. Granby was a hero, whereas I was just an ordinary sort of fellow who had no wish to be hanged.

"There is still another minute," came the voice of Caramac.

The time was passing. I could feel Archimedes getting a firm grip upon my ankles so that he might cast me loose as he stepped from under me.

I shut my eyes and waited. Some one was breathing heavily, in great gasps, beneath me. That was the count. Surely the minute must be up by now.

"Ah," said Caramac softly.

I opened my eyes. Something white was fluttering from the dovecote, a cloth or handkerchief shaken from the roof. Then, as we all looked, watching breathlessly, the door in the dovecote opened and a slight figure appeared. Almost at the same time I felt the noose pass roughly across my face and I slipped, half-fainting, into the arms of one of the Negroes.

Now I was on the ground, staggering and shaken. Somebody was fumbling with my pinioned arms. The sense of constriction passed and I was free. There were steps and voices all about me, but for a moment everything was vague and uncertain. Then the scene came

suddenly clear as when one focusses a pair of field glasses.

Tanyi was talking to Caramac.

"I will take Archimedes," he said. "Mr. Carroll also shall accompany me. Perhaps you will see that Mr. Carstairs is warned and hold yourselves ready to send supplies to the dovecote. That was also stipulated."

He moved in the direction of the dovecote as he spoke, and I found that Archimedes was waiting at my elbow. I looked towards Caramac in his chair.

"Farewell, Mr. Carroll," he said softly. "For the moment we restore you to your friends, but perhaps we shall meet again. I shall, in any case, remember that you have tasted the bitterness of death — *once*."

My eyes wandered uncertainly from face to face. Richards, still white, looked quickly away. The count, with a dazed but unsated expression in his small eyes, passed a moist tongue over his lips. Archimedes, stolidly deferential, stared back at me from a mask of polished ebony.

I turned to follow Tanyi and found that he had already gone halfway to meet Granby, and they were already in conversation by the time I had got within earshot.

"Then with your permission, Colonel, the search shall go forward," Tanyi was saying.

Granby nodded, pistol in hand, and standing aside, allowed us to pass into the dovecote. He showed but little interest in my presence and made no comment upon the recent performance. He preceded Tanyi up the winding stair and one by one we entered the circular room. Granby took up a commanding position with his

back to the door of the cupboard, which we had opened during our first imprisonment.

It was then that I saw Diana. She was lying on the circular divan. There were deep shadows of exhaustion under her eyes and she was fast asleep.

"Granby," I whispered.

He looked across at me for an instant and nodded.

"Yes," he said, "she did not sleep at all last night and now — as you see. She knows nothing of what has happened since — since eight o'clock this morning."

I looked at Granby in gratitude. But his attention had wandered. Leaning back against the cupboard door he was watching the proceedings of Archimedes, who was now passing his hands rapidly round the upholstery of the divan.

I heard a step on the stairs and Richards appeared in the doorway.

"Can I help?" he asked.

Tanyi nodded.

"Search the stairs," he said briefly.

Richards lumbered out. I saw the woolly heads of two Negroes peering over the threshold. Archimedes, pausing from his labours, gave them their instructions. They appeared to have some difficulty in understanding what they had to look for, but in the end they disappeared, and during the next half hour I inferred from the noises which came from all parts of the dovecote that the search outside the circular room was being very thoroughly conducted. Meanwhile Archimedes, under the direction of Tanyi, very quickly exhausted the possible hiding places in the circular room, while Granby, to my surprise, submitted to a courteous re-

quest from Tanyi that he should himself be searched by the general.

Very soon Richards appeared at the door again.

"Well," he said, "any luck in here?"

"Nothing, so far," said Tanyi.

Richards looked significantly at Diana, still asleep on the divan.

"I should of course be sorry to disturb a lady," he observed.

General Tanyi turned at once to me.

"Mr. Carroll," he said, "if you wouldn't mind," he looked as he spoke towards Diana.

I bent down and lifted her in my arms. So soundly was she sleeping that she did not wake as I moved her to a part of the divan already searched by Archimedes.

Nothing came of Richard's suggestion and he seemed inclined to resent the fact.

"Colonel Granby has himself been searched?" he enquired of Tanyi.

"Of course," he replied.

Again Richards looked towards Diana. I read his thought and, truce or no truce, prepared to give him a black eye if he made so much as a move.

Tanyi's attention, however, was elsewhere. He was looking at Granby and I realised at once what was passing in his mind. Granby was still standing by the cupboard door and there was something wrong about his attitude. It was — how shall I describe it? — too easy by half. It was as though he were shouting aloud: I'm standing here quite by accident, ladies and gentlemen. In other words, he was overdoing it.

"That cupboard," said Tanyi briefly.

Granby started. The man was a bundle of nerves. His face changed and I saw him grip with a fierce, instinctive gesture, the pistol in his hand.

Tanyi saw it too.

"The cupboard, if you don't mind, Colonel Granby," he repeated.

Granby stood sullenly aside as Archimedes approached. The door of the cupboard was wrenched open and we all four stood staring into it. Archimedes pointed a huge black finger at the gaping door and I saw at once what Granby had done. The panel inside was covered with figures scrawled in pencil.

This, then, was the copy for which Tanyi was looking and it must be confessed that the notion was not so bad. That door might well have been opened and shut without any one noticing Granby's device. He had planned it in one of his brighter moments but alas! no one, I reflected, could be always at his best.

Tanyi was already looking at the figures on the panel. He lifted his head and looked at Granby.

"You still have the original document, I think?" he said.

Without a word, Granby extracted the blue envelope from his pocket and handed it to the General. Tanyi quickly took from it the flimsy sheet on which the miller had written his message. He opened it and compared it with the scrawl upon the door. Then he stepped back and I could hardly forbear laughing, though heaven knows I would much rather have cried. Tanyi, the representative of a gang of criminals, was looking at Colonel Granby, representative of order and honesty, and Colonel Granby was hanging his head like a school boy

detected — could hardly look his man in the face. He was, in fact, so obviously out of countenance that Tanyi, with a good feeling that did him credit, was moved to let him down gently.

"I'm sorry, Colonel Granby," he said. "You have failed to treat me with the candour which I had not perhaps in the circumstances the right to expect. But all's well that ends well. We have the document and now we have the copy. The agreement can therefore be carried out. Mr. Carstairs will join you presently and you shall be supplied with provisions. You will all stay here unmolested as long as we are at the château, provided, of course, you make no effort to escape."

"Excuse me, sar," came the voice of Archimedes, "but what am I to do with this?"

He pointed as he spoke at the cupboard door.

Tanyi smiled.

"Bring it along, Archimedes," he said.

The big Negro bent to his task. There was a sound of splintering wood and a moment later, like Samson carrying the gates of Gaza, he crossed the room and vanished into the spiral staircase.

Tanyi made to follow, but turned to me as he did so.

"Mr. Carroll," he said, "I'm glad to see you alive and well."

"Pray don't mention it," I responded.

The general bowed.

"Now, Colonel Granby," he said, "I am at your service. Shall we go down together?"

CHAPTER XVI

I WATCH CROWS FEED AND PIGEONS FED

For a moment I stood by the door. The footsteps of Granby, with Richards and the attendant Negroes, died away down the winding stair. Then eagerly I turned, and not a moment too soon. Diana, awake at last, was sitting upright on the divan, but at sight of me she got to her feet and looked at me uncertainly. Her eyes were still heavy with sleep and she had an air of as yet being scarcely in the world.

Voices came up to me from the garden, but I scarcely heard them. Diana was in the dovecote. The decadent count and the nightmare in which he lived — these were outside, shut away from the cool, clean darkness of the tower. I walked, not very steadily, across the room. Diana put out a cautious, inquiring hand.

"Yes," I said, "we're both awake."

I pulled her towards me.

"Geoffrey," she said at last, in a smothered voice, "something will break if you don't let go."

Vaguely I heard some one enter the room. There was a shuffling of feet. I looked up. Archimedes had entered with four of his Negroes. Two of them were supporting Carstairs, whom they laid upon the divan near the door. Each of the others carried a large tray laden with supplies, while Granby stood beside Tanyi in the doorway.

Diana broke from my arms. Carstairs, his face white and drawn, was sitting up on the divan. He gazed at us in bewilderment. Diana moved towards him.

"My poor David," she said. "What have they been doing to you?"

She put a hand on his shoulder to make him lie down again.

"Must get out of this dugout," he muttered, "join the men on the fire step."

"It's all right, David," Diana was saying. "Don't worry, old man."

She beckoned to me with her hand. I crossed the room quickly. His face cleared at the sight of me.

"Good old Geoffrey," he said. "Got away with it, have you? But where are we? This is a rum show," and he looked vaguely about him.

Then he turned to me.

"Sorry, old man," he went on. "But the trip to Marseilles was a complete washout. I didn't even get as far as — what's the name of the place? — Remoulins. Just couldn't manage it — that's all."

His voice was firm but weak.

"A trifle dicky since the war," he continued, "and those blacks did knock me up a bit. 'Fraid the car's ditched not far off the mill. Must have fainted or something."

"Don't worry, David," I said. "Just lie down and rest."

"Rest?" he repeated. "Do you know, I think I will. I feel dashed sleepy."

He lay back as he spoke and sighed heavily once or twice. Then, as Diana withdrew her hand from his wrist,

he turned a little on his side and a moment later his regular breathing showed that he had fallen asleep.

"His pulse is all right," said Diana in a low tone. "Better leave him as he is."

I looked towards the door. The room was empty. The Negroes had departed and Granby, presumably, was seeing Tanyi off the premises, signing the Protocol or Final Act, whatever they call it.

I drew Diana across the room and we sat down near the door. It was very still in that strange circular place. The air was warm and dim, for there were no windows. The sunlight pierced like sharp swords, through the chain of slits round the room. Above us in the loft we could hear vague cooings and the rustling of pinions as the pigeons moved.

"Now, Diana darling," I said, "tell me what has happened. How did you manage to get away from the château and . . . the count?"

"That was Toby," she answered. "I was brought along by Archimedes and his men in a kind of chair with windows and a flap in front like the old hansom cabs. Only it was locked and I couldn't get out. Caramac was in that chair when I saw him first."

"Yes," I said, "go on."

"Well, they carried me along the road and up the path behind the hotel. We didn't meet a soul till we got near the end of the path — you remember where it stops, just by the open space near the château and the demilune of pillars?"

"Not far from here," I put in.

She nodded.

"We were just leaving the path," she went on, "and

had turned to the right to go towards the château when suddenly we came to a halt. I heard voices some little distance away, but the windows of the chair were shut and I couldn't hear what was said. It was like bees buzzing, only I was in the hive instead of outside. Then" — and she paused dramatically — "a face appeared at the window."

"Was it . . . was it square and red with thin lips and eyes set rather too close together?" I asked anxiously.

Diana laughed.

"Not a bit," she said. "It was oval and the eyes were wide apart and perhaps the nose was a trifle tip-tilted — altogether a most charming face."

"Marie," I said.

"Marie, I expect it was," continued Diana. "It was, as I have said, a pretty face, but the expression wasn't pretty at all. I didn't mind that, however, because she made Archimedes open the door of the chair. He did not want to do it, but he was clearly afraid of Marie. So I sat there a moment and looked at Marie and she looked at me, and, my dear, it really was too amusing, because after we had stared at each other for ages Marie suddenly said: 'I should like to spit in your face.' I was taken all aback."

"But I know the reason of that," I said. "Marie, my dear, is — well — Marie is — the — er — friend of the count."

"Why not say mistress and be done with it?" replied Diana. "I love you very much, Geoffrey, but this Victorian manner is a little trying at times, especially as we're married."

"Very well, 'mistress', if you like that better. And she took you for a hated rival."

"I didn't stay for the spitting," Diana continued, "but just hopped out of that chair like a . . . like a . . . What sort of people hop out of chairs?"

"Lamplighters," I said. "But do get on with it, old thing."

"It was then that she called me a slut, and it seemed unlikely that we were going to be friends. I was just trying to hit upon a suitable retort in French, but could only think of 'sad individual', when there was a tremendous commotion among the black servants standing at the head of the path. I looked round and I never saw anything so thrilling."

"Well," I prompted.

"There, if you will believe me, was Toby. He was standing in the thick of the Negroes and pretty thick they were. He had a pistol in his hand and he was yelling like . . . who was the man with the voice?"

"Stentor?" I suggested.

"He was yelling like Stentor and he was yelling at me. 'Run to the dovecote,' he shouted, and I ran. I just pushed your little friend Marie out of the way and ran like . . . who was the woman who ran?"

"Atalanta," I groaned.

Diana continued.

"I had not run more than ten yards when I heard a shot behind me and presently the sound of footsteps and heavy breathing."

She paused again.

"Do get on with it, Di," I urged.

"By that time," she went on serenely, "I was close

to the door, but I had to turn half round as I pulled it open and then I nearly wept with delight. For it was only Toby behind me, though there were several niggers in pursuit. We closed the door only just in time."

"Thank God they didn't shoot," I said.

"They were afraid of hitting me, I think," Diana answered. "Once inside Toby made fast the door and led me up here, where we watched them holding an indignation meeting on the lawn, well out of range. Archimedes was showing most of the indignation."

"Good old Toby," I said. "It was a damn fine show."

"Sorry," came a voice from the doorway, "but I couldn't help it."

Granby was standing on the threshold, smiling.

"Diana arrived just as I was trying to depart. There seemed nothing else to do after Geoffrey had so basely deserted me."

"Here, I say," I broke in. "What else could I have done?"

He laid a hand on my shoulder.

"Nothing at all, old boy," he admitted. "You acted quite rightly and for the best."

"Drop a curtsey to the gentleman and let him have your sweet to suck," put in Diana.

"It was this way," continued Granby, "General Tanyi, Richards, and the rest sat round the dovecote all night, but they were getting pretty bored when the sun came up and they retired for a glass of sherry and a biscuit about eleven o'clock, leaving the black troops to carry on. Archimedes seized this opportunity, most unwisely, to do a little bit of private business for the count. Anyway he made off with some of his men, taking the old

familiar path we know so well. I hadn't, of course, a notion of what they were intending to do, but it weakened the siege party considerably and I cast about for some means of distracting the attention of those who had been left behind. I rummaged about a bit and found some rags and the broken staves of what might once have been a barrel of wine. They were in the cellar down below. With these I rigged up a kind of dummy on a pole and carried it up to the roof. I moved it about and got it well shot at until one bullet knocked my hat off its head. Then I gave a truly heart-rending cry and toppled the whole contraption backwards on to the roof. Then I ran downstairs and watched from one of the slits till I saw the besiegers coming to carry away the corpse. As soon as they got behind the dovecote, I opened the door and made for the scrub . . ."

"Like a lamplighter," I interjected. "Or Atalanta, if you prefer."

"Fleeter of foot than the fleet foot kid," he corrected.

I was glad to note that Granby was himself again.

"My little game with the dummy on the roof had taken some little time," he continued, "and what with one thing and another, I reached the path to salvation just as Diana turned up in the palanquin. You know the rest. There was a bit of a shamozzle, and I had to pop off the gun to cover our retreat. It was no longer possible to get away."

He paused.

"So here we all are," he concluded abruptly.

"What next?" I said at last.

"Sentry go," replied Granby. "This treaty of peace is all very well and I think Tanyi is an honest fellow.

But Caramac would give his eyes to skin us both alive and we shall do well to keep an eye on the lot of them. Remember, too, that the siege may be raised at any moment and I don't propose to stay here longer than is necessary. Your turn first, Geoffrey. Go upstairs and keep a lookout through the slits in the parapet."

I rose from the divan. Granby was looking at me quizzically.

"Sorry about this morning," he said. "But not a word," and he glanced at Diana as he spoke.

Diana, however, was busy with Carstairs, still asleep on the divan and Granby bent suddenly forward.

"I never intended that they should hang you, Geoffrey," he said in a low voice. "It was just an experiment."

"Thank you," I said.

But Granby was now looking ruefully at the gash in the wall where the cupboard door had lately stood. He shook his head sadly once or twice.

"Pity about that," he murmured. "Tanyi guessed it in one. I can't think how he did."

I forebore to make any comment. I had no wish to rub it in. He had rescued Diana and he had allowed her to sleep through the morning.

Sentry go behind the parapet was a tedious business and I saw nothing of our enemies for some while. The landscape dreamed in hot morning air. It was very still except for the monotonous noise of cicalas, like distant running water. Soon I began to wonder whether Tanyi had been really serious about the siege. Were they prepared to prevent our escape by force of arms? Beside me on the roof was the dummy which Granby had used

to draw the enemy's fire previous to his sortie of yesterday. I picked it up and thrust it well above the parapet.

Several shots rang out from near the château — I heard the impact of a bullet on the wall in front of me. There was one question settled at any rate. Tanyi had made his arrangements and this was a reminder.

I was just resuming my watch when the face of Granby, white and strained, appeared from the landing below.

"It's all right, Granby," I said. "They were only shooting at that," and I pointed at the dummy on the floor.

"Then don't let them do it again," he said irritably. "They'll frighten the pigeons."

Only his head and shoulders were above the trapdoor and I looked down at him compassionately.

"Very well, old boy," I said soothingly. "You go down below. Try to get a little sleep."

He gave me an odd smile.

"Bad as that, is it?" he replied. "No matter, I'll relieve you at two o'clock."

The time dragged slowly on. At about noon, I noticed for the first time one of the besiegers. He was leaning against a tree, in the shade and well out of range. He had a rifle pointed in our direction. I could not see him very clearly but it was good enough. The enemy were still there.

My thoughts were a mixture of gladness and gloom. I was thankful that we were all safe, especially Diana. True, we were besieged, but that was no great matter and the siege would be lifted soon. It was there that the gladness ended and the gloom began. We had utterly

failed, all of us, and Granby most of all. It was true he had found the message of the miller, but it had been snatched from him at the last moment and we knew nothing and now had no means of ever knowing anything of the plans of our enemies, who were at large and departing to an unknown destination. Their plans were to be launched on the fifteenth — the very next day, in fact, and we hadn't the slightest idea when, where or how the signal would be given.

Caramac had triumphed. The quiet cripple with his twisted mind in his twisted body had the better of us all. He would retire with his accomplices to fulfill an unknown scheme and we, powerless to act, should have to wait until some disaster, revealing at last the League of Discontent, came with blinding suddenness out of the blue.

I had reached this stage in my reflections when Granby came, sooner than he had promised, to relieve me. I stood beside him a moment as he gazed with sombre blue eyes over the exquisite grey land.

"Look here, Toby," I said, "can't we make a break for it?"

He looked at me vaguely and I had to repeat my remark before it seemed to penetrate.

"No, we can't," he said shortly. "I can't leave the dovecote. To stay here is our only chance.

"They're still about, I suppose," he added.

For answer I pointed towards the black sentinel whom I had noticed an hour ago. He was still in the same position.

I looked at Granby sidelong as I spoke. He was peering tensely through the slit in front of him and as I

noted the puckered skin round his eyes and the unsmiling mouth, I realised how much more was at stake for him than for me. This was his show. His career, not mine, was in the balance.

"Toby," I said gently. "Do go down and sleep a bit. I'm quite able to carry on. Send up Diana with a sandwich or something."

"Sleep," he said. "Not a hope. Don't you realise, Geoffrey? To-day is the fourteenth of October. Perhaps I may sleep on the sixteenth but not before."

I saw there was nothing to be done with him, so I went below.

Yes, it was indeed worse for him than for me. Diana was safe. So was Carstairs. So, if it came to that, was I. We had only to wait until the Negroes were called off and we should be able to slip from the dovecote and resume our interrupted holiday, if we still had the heart for it. For myself, I was tired, hungry and resigned to failure. Diana, freedom, sunshine — these things were infinitely precious.

I entered our prison to find Carstairs sitting up and taking nourishment out of a china pot — *foie gras* to be exact. He was looking much the better for it too. A glass with yellow wine in it was in his free hand. I joined him without waiting for an invitation. On the tray in front of him was a cold chicken and some excellent ham.

"It's curious," he was saying with his mouth full, "how well this monstrous sweet wine of Montbazillac goes with the tortured liver of a goose."

"Well," I said, "David, at least, seems to be well on the way to recovery."

"Why *at least*," asked Diana. "Is there anything the matter with Toby?"

"He is certainly feeling the strain," I replied.

"I'm not surprised at that," said Diana. "He hasn't slept a wink since we've been here."

I managed, after a very satisfactory lunch, to sleep myself for an hour or more. I should, in fact, have slept even longer, but I was roused by Diana about four o'clock.

"Toby wants you," she said, shaking me by the shoulder.

I sat up yawning.

"I ought to have relieved him long ago," I said reproachfully.

Getting to my feet I moved towards the stair. Granby's voice, urgent and rather tense, came down to me as I climbed, telling me "to pick my feet up and get a move on!"

He met me at the top of the stair and, without a word, took me by the arm and led me to the parapet.

"What is it?" I asked, still heavy with sleep. "Anything new?"

He did not answer, but pointed in silence to the edge of the thick wood not far from the end of the path. I looked as he bade me. Everything seemed exactly as it had been when I left my post a couple of hours ago. The Negro sentinel was still at his post in the shade of the juniper and his rifle was still pointing at the dovecote.

"Look again," said Granby.

"I'm looking," I said. "But I've seen it all before."

"Sure?" asked Granby.

"Let me tell you," he added quickly, "that our black

friend over there hasn't moved a muscle since you saw him last."

I stared at the man again, then at Granby and then back at the black sentry.

Then I noticed something else.

Two or three broad-winged birds of considerable size and black as jet were hovering about his head.

"But he's been there the whole time," I objected more to myself than to Granby, "and we haven't fired a shot."

"I did — yesterday," he replied shortly, "several, in fact."

"I — d-don't understand," I stammered.

"I do," said Granby grimly. "It means, my dear Geoffrey, that we've been besieged in this dovecote for the last two hours at least by a dead man. The hand of Caramac has not yet lost its cunning."

He broke off and gripped me by the arm.

"And here, if I'm not mistaken, are the relieving forces," he continued.

I became aware of a number of figures moving near the summit of the path. They resolved themselves into a man wearing, as far as I could see, a tropical suit of brown linen and a number of French *gendarmes* in blue. Then I heard footsteps behind us and I turned to see the head of Carstairs popping up from the trapdoor like a jack-in-the-box.

"It's the police," he said a little breathlessly. "I saw them below."

Granby was looking intently at the man in the brown suit.

"That's Bosanquet," he announced.

He turned quickly to me.

"Go down and meet him, Geoffrey," he continued. "I'll follow you in a brace of shakes."

We descended the stairs. Diana was waiting in the room below and she faced us eagerly as we entered.

"Yes, Diana," I said. "It's all right. The police are here."

I caught her hand in passing. Together we opened the heavy door and in another moment I found myself once more, after an interval of some six hours, on the grass lawn leading to the demilune.

We met Bosanquet halfway across the open space. He was of medium height with a small moustache and a bronzed face, alert in manner and with a habit of quiet authority. He looked at us steadily and, removing his hat, bowed to Diana. Then he turned to Carstairs.

"I do not see Colonel Granby," he said. "Is he not also present?"

Carstairs nodded.

"He will be down here in a moment," he replied, "and very glad to see you. A good deal has happened since I saw you last."

Carstairs and Diana began to explain rapidly what had occurred since their visit to Marseilles and, as I had not yet been presented to Bosanquet and had no wish to delay their story, I left them together and walked over to the knot of *gendarmes* which, at the further end of the grass plot was busy about the figure of the Negro sentinel. But I did not stay there long. I saw at once that this unit of the besieging force was dead, a fact which the crows had discovered for themselves some time ago. He had been propped up facing the dovecote, an

eyeless horror, with a rifle levelled at the parapet where we had recently stood on guard. I turned away feeling slightly sick.

Then, to my surprise, I found myself confronting the little *commissaire de police* from Remoulins.

I moved instinctively back but, all smiles and apologies, he offered me his hand and burst into a torrent of explanations.

I thought for a moment that he would kiss me on the cheeks. I do not remember exactly what he said, but all was forgotten and all, he very earnestly hoped, would be forgiven. He had been deceived. The count who, it surprisingly seemed, was a sad individual, had removed himself, but steps the most energetic would be taken to apprehend him and his strange companions.

I stood amazed at this sudden and unexpected conversion. What had happened? Was this the work of Bosanquet? Or had the *commissaire* realised that, having come down on the wrong side of the fence, he must lose no time in getting back again? I fell into step beside him, assuring him gently — which was quite untrue, but we might still be needing his help — that I had suffered no inconvenience whatever at his hands.

Meanwhile the *gendarmes*, of whom there appeared to be four, had spread themselves along the margin of the wood or moved off towards the château, and I walked back with the *commissaire* to rejoin the group in front of the dovecote.

The excitement of our rescue had faded rapidly. We were free and the whole French Republic was now apparently at our disposal. Nevertheless we were helpless. Here were the police, but there was no one for them

to arrest. Here was Bosanquet and his codes were doubtless on the way. But there was nothing for him to decipher.

Meanwhile where was Granby? Or rather what was he doing in the dovecote? It was unlike him to be wasting time. There were decisions to be taken. The police were presumably awaiting instructions and this, as he was very apt to insist, was his show.

Carstairs, with Diana to prompt him, was finishing his tale and the British consul from Marseilles, mopping his forehead with a yellow handkerchief, was gazing at the dovecote. He evidently shared my surprise at Granby's continued absence.

"Isn't it time we saw something of the colonel?" he asked at length.

We moved towards the dovecote, but stopped abruptly at the door. Strange sounds were proceeding from within. There was an agitated flutter of wings and several pigeons appeared hurriedly at their front doors. One or two even took the air and came fluttering round our heads.

I waved them away irritably.

"Don't do that, you fool."

It was Granby speaking. There he was at last, standing in the doorway. He was dusty about the knees and elbows and there was a large smear of dirt across his forehead. In his right hand he held a hat — it was Diana's — and with his left hand full of crumbled bread and crusts he walked delicately towards us like Agag, scattering the fragments as he came.

Soon the pigeons were fluttering all about him.

"Coop, coop," said Granby. "Coop, coop, coop."

I started forward in consternation, but he turned savagely upon me.

"Stand still, Geoffrey, can't you," he snapped, "and give the poor birds a chance."

CHAPTER XVII

I READ THE MILLER'S MESSAGE

I hadn't a doubt that Granby had gone off his head. The strain of the last few days had been too much for him and this was the end. It was not, in the circumstances, surprising. For months he had needed a holiday and in place of it he had passed four of the busiest and most exasperating days of his life. For the last twenty-four hours, while I had been having at least a run for my money, fleeing from Archimedes, falling foul of the police, breaking prison, playing bricklayer and ghost — he had been shut in the dovecote inactive but ceaselessly vigilant, not daring to sleep and looking his failure steadily in the face. It was enough to shake the wits of the most phlegmatic of men and Granby was anything but that.

Meanwhile, there he stood, bareheaded in the sunlight, hat in hand and addressing the fowls of the air.

"Coop, coop," he said again, "coop, coop, coop."

With a sweeping gesture he scattered from Diana's hat the last of the bread and crumbled crusts and, with a whir of feathers and a rustling of folding wings, every pigeon within sight or sound descended upon the feast.

"Quick, Geoffrey," he shouted, "now's your chance. Take the brown one with the white head. The grey one with the barred tail is mine. And be careful not to top your shot, or you'll bunker the whole lot of us."

He approached the vortex of birds as he spoke and, poised on tiptoe, stood for a moment above the feathered carpet.

Diana was to his right a yard or so distant.

"Humour him," she whispered.

"Are you ready?" said Granby in a high whisper.

I nodded.

"Forrard on then," and simultaneously we plunged.

There was a smothered squawk, a flapping of wings, and I found myself holding a pigeon in my right hand.

Granby, equally successful, glanced at it anxiously.

"No good," he said. "That isn't the fellow at all. I want the brown one with the white head, down there in the second row of the scrum. Quick — Diana."

Diana, standing beside him, dived for the bird in question while I stupidly released my own and watched him rise with a fearsome clatter of wings to the shelter of the dovecote. Diana, I perceived, had secured the brown one and was stroking its head in a vain effort to calm its terrors.

"Now then, Geoffrey," said Granby irritably, "don't stand there as if we had the whole afternoon before us. Come and lend a hand and for God's sake be careful how you untie the threads."

"Threads?" I murmured.

He thrust the bird towards me so that its little pink feet stuck out.

Then I saw what he meant.

Round each of the pigeon's thighs was a slim packet of blue silk.

A little dazed by this unexpected discovery I drew

near and with great caution untied the threads which secured the packets, while the pigeon struggled aimlessly. At last it was done and, with a clatter of wings, the bird rose from Granby's open palms.

He took eagerly the two tiny rolls which I held out to him.

"Got yours, Diana?" he called over his shoulder.

"Safe and sound," replied Carstairs, who had been helping Diana, "but her bird has had a peck at one of them."

"What's that?" said Granby. "Let me see."

The four slips of silk lay in Granby's hand. I saw now that one of them had been pecked open. Within lay a roll of tightly packed paper, bearing the mark of the pigeon's beak.

Granby examined it with concern.

"I hope to God he hasn't eaten anything vital," he murmured.

Light was beginning to dawn. Something was written on these little bundles of paper. And what could it be but the miller's message?

"By Jove, Granby," I blurted out. "That's devilish neat. And I thought you were — "

I paused.

"Go on," he urged grimly. "You thought there were spiders on the ceiling. Life had been too much for your Uncle Granby. Wits given way under the strain. Sweet bells jangled, out of tune and harsh. Such a fine upstanding fellow, too."

"You might have told me," I protested feebly.

Granby looked at me quizzically.

"Excuse me, Geoffrey," he said, "but if people choose

to think I'm a damn fool or going off my head, I don't see why I should waste my time undeceiving them."

"Sorry," I said shortly.

Granby smiled and pressed my arm.

"Don't be an ass, Geoffrey," he urged. "I really ought to have told you but your silent sympathy was too — too rich. I felt I must really live up to it."

"The cupboard door was a blind," I said.

"Of course."

"And all that fuss about the search?"

"Naturally."

He chuckled suddenly.

"Poor little Tanyi," he said. "Exit distinguished military officer, followed by black troops bearing door. An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign. And it was given unto them while all the time the little dears up in the loft were carrying the message of the bold bad miller from the fourteenth stair. I had a notion that two copies might be rather useful. And so it turned out. I was able to lead Tanyi straight to one of them and here is the other."

He gazed as he spoke at the blue packets in the palm of his hand. My own attention had wandered to the gallows tree which stood some fifty yards away, its garlands wilting under the hot sun. Granby looked up and followed the direction of my gaze.

"Yes, Geoffrey," he said. "I played it pretty fine, but you were never in any real danger of death by judicial hanging."

There came a sound at my elbow and I turned to see Diana looking at me with a white face.

I nodded.

"Yes," I said bitterly, "I was very nearly hanged this morning and Toby never turned a hair."

Meanwhile, he had unfolded the little blue packets which we had taken from the legs of the pigeons and was putting their contents into his waistcoat pocket.

"Cigarette papers," I observed.

"The last of my lovely gaspers," said Granby, "and a good silk handkerchief gone West. And nobody even offers me something to smoke."

Carstairs, without a word, handed him an open cigarette case. Granby lit up and exhaled a blue cloud into the autumn air.

"Well," said Carstairs, "at last, we shall know."

Granby turned to Bosanquet.

"Got those codes?" he asked.

"They will be at Arles to-night," replied the British Consul. "They are sending a special man out from London — Jefferson is his name."

Granby nodded.

"Good," he said. "Then clearly we must go to Arles — unless of course, some of your merry men have found anything or anybody at the château."

With one accord we moved across the lawn, past the demilune and the fountain towards the château. Granby put his arm through that of Bosanquet who had so far followed our proceedings with an air of respectful mystification.

"Good of you to turn up," said Granby. "But how on earth did you get the police to act?"

"No difficulty at all," said Bosanquet. "I just came along on principle, as it were. I gathered from your

friend Carstairs and Mrs. Carroll that you were getting rather tied up."

"Not at all," said Granby.

"So I came over to make a few enquiries," continued Bosanquet. "I duly arrived at the Pont du Gard and had a chat with the innkeeper. The innkeeper was upset. Colonel Granby and his friends had disappeared. True, they had paid the bill, but they had left all their luggage behind, and their magnificent automobile had been discovered empty in a ditch not far away from the old mill on the other side of the Garron."

I glanced at Carstairs.

"I accordingly went to the police at Remoulins," Bosanquet continued.

"Are you sure they didn't offer to arrest you?" I enquired.

"On the contrary. They were most obliging, especially the *commissaire* — put all his men at my disposal and telephoned to Nîmes for reinforcements."

"But here is the man himself," concluded Bosanquet.

"Messieurs," said a voice in French with a strong meridional accent, "the bandits have escaped. We seek them everywhere in vain."

We had arrived at the door of the château. The little *commissaire* stood beside it, twisting his black moustache and assuming a useful expression. The whole force of the mighty Republic of France, it seemed to say, was now at our disposal.

Suddenly I had an inspiration and turned to Bosanquet.

"Tell me," I said, "who exactly is Trochet?"

The little *commissaire* started at the name. Evidently I was on the right track.

"Trochet," replied Bosanquet crisply, "was until yesterday Minister of the Interior."

"Just so," broke in the little *commissaire*, "Minister of the Interior, Monsieur, and a great friend of the Count de Vallantré. Monsieur will realise — "

He broke off and spread his hands in deprecation. His brown eyes, heavy with unspoken thought, looked pleadingly into mine, demanding as from man to man what more could usefully be said on the subject.

I turned to Granby and told him of the references made to Trochet by the count during our last interview with Caramac.

Granby nodded.

"That explains it," he said. "The count was relying on his pull with Trochet. As soon as Trochet resigned our friends knew that they might have to clear out at any minute."

It became increasingly evident that we should henceforth have the enthusiastic support of the French authorities. During the next half-hour, the *commissaire* and his men ransacked the château from cellar to garret. They found nothing of official interest, but some of the count's albums, hastily hidden at the approach of Diana, caused them infinite delight. Diana, full of curiosity, insisted on wandering round the château in my company, and we spent in this way, I suppose, the best part of an hour, while Carstairs went off with one of the *gendarmes* to retrieve the Rolls, and Granby retired with Bosanquet to the count's library, where they copied out on a stout sheet of foolscap the figures which

he had set down upon the cigarette papers and tied to the pigeons' legs.

These figures, for which one man had died in agony, another been flogged nearly to death and I myself been all but hanged, are before me as I write. They are blurred now and I cannot read them easily, but on that afternoon they were legible enough, written in Granby's microscopic hand with the stump of an indelible pencil sharpened to a fine point.

"It might have been worse," Granby was saying as Diana and I entered the library after our tour of the château. "But the greedy bird seems to have eaten only the first few groups and we have most of the message. It only remains to pick up the codes. I suggest we get along and see whether the Rolls is still in commission."

We walked down the path together. Two *gendarmes* were to remain in charge of the deserted château and the little *commissaire* stayed behind to seal the doors and windows, a procedure which appeared to fill him with a strange satisfaction.

So down the path we went in the evening light, pausing a moment to look back at the demilune. The white statues gleamed between the pillars and there came to our ears the plash and purr of the fountain. I had a sudden memory of Richards in his gown, the count fantastic in white satin, Tanyi, with his twitching eyelid and splendid uniform which sat so quaintly upon him, the light figures that had drifted from between the pillars and Caramac, drawing the book from his pocket with a little sigh. And there, too, dark against the painted sky, stood the gibbet and behind us the château fading back into the shadows.

Impulsively I seized Diana by the arm.

"Sweetheart," I said, "it's all over."

"Perhaps," she answered.

She looked at Granby as she spoke, and I realised with a shock that what might be an end for us was for him only the beginning. He held in his hands a clue which he would follow and not set his life at a pin's fee.

We found Carstairs at the inn. The Rolls, apparently not much the worse for wear, was ready and we clambered in, putting Bosanquet at the back between Granby and me, while Diana took the wheel.

"To Arles, I suppose?" she said.

"Forrard on," came from Granby.

"Arles," murmured Carstairs, "is a nice place. They have a method of cooking *aubergines* with cheese and just a suspicion of garlic. Also to-morrow there is a bullfight."

"Do I want to see a bullfight?" wondered Diana.

"It's not a real bullfight," replied Carstairs, as we rolled smoothly along the road towards Beaucaire, where stands the great castle of St. Louis where Aucassin wooed Nicolette. "It's only a Provençal fight, a merry little show. They let half a dozen bulls into the ring one after another. Each of them has a cockade between his horns and anybody who likes may jump into the ring and try to snatch it. It's great fun and no one enjoys it more than the bull. The local nuts at it are called *razateurs* and they have a little three-fingered fork with hooks instead of prongs which fits over their hands like a knuckle-duster and they snatch the cockade with that."

"It sounds amusing," said Diana.

Carstairs nodded.

"It ought to be to-morrow," he added. "I was looking at the local paper while waiting for you at the inn. There is to be some sort of gala. Somebody big is turning up — I forget who he is; but the mayor and corporation will be parading in tummy bands and men and maidens — I hope there will be maidens — are going to dance a *farandole* before the bull-running."

It was past seven when we reached Arles. We dropped Granby at the station to await the King's Messenger from London and the rest of us descended upon the new hotel — the Jules César, I think it is called, just outside the old town on the way to the Aliscamps.

We bathed, ordered dinner — at least Carstairs saw to that — and waited for Granby.

He arrived half an hour later than we expected, just as Bosanquet, who had a moment previously been summoned to the *bureau*, entered the room with the green form of a telegram in his hand.

"The King's Messenger wasn't there," began Granby wrathfully.

"No," snapped Bosanquet, waving his telegram. "The idiot missed his train in Paris. He won't be here until to-morrow morning."

"Confound him," said Granby. "Why on earth didn't he come by air?"

"He didn't understand it was important, I suppose," said Bosanquet soothingly.

"Important," said Granby. "Do you realise that to-morrow is the fifteenth of October? That's when the whole thing goes off with a bang, and we haven't a notion when or where or what it will be."

No one seeing us that night at dinner would have guessed that we were celebrating our return to liberty. Granby was fretful and ill at ease and he infected us all. Carstairs after several gallant efforts to distract him was presently reduced to silence and set himself to a dogged consumption of large quantities of excellent food, without pleasure or comment and, when dinner was at last finished, we sat disconsolately round a table in the lounge.

Granby and Bosanquet shortly went off somewhere together on business of their own, and soon after their departure, Carstairs rose to his feet.

"I'm for bed," he said. "Still feel a bit dicky.

"Show you the sights to-morrow, Diana," he added. "The Aliscamps are rather fetching."

I smiled wearily. It was like Carstairs to suggest the Aliscamps. They consist of a broad avenue lined on either side with tombs — an ancient burial ground of the Roman masters of the city.

Diana also rose.

"Come on, Geoffrey," she said. "We are all looking a trifle wan."

"Wan?" I protested, stifling my twenty-seventh yawn, "I never felt better in my life."

But Diana was right.

We staggered to the lift and so to our rich rooms on the second floor. Personally I knew no more until ten o'clock the next morning.

I awoke to find myself alone. On my pillow was a note from Diana.

"Sweet sluggard," it ran, "gone away with David to see the Aliscamps."

I rose unwillingly, rang for coffee and, going to Granby's room, tapped upon the door. I entered to find him in his shirt sleeves sitting at a table scribbling busily. Bosanquet was standing beside him.

"Hullo, Geoffrey," he said. "We've just got back from the station. The train was three hours late. But here, at last, are the codes."

He waved at me a bundle of official-looking papers.

"Can I help?" I said, glancing at Bosanquet.

Granby shook his head.

"No," he answered, "this decoding is a tiresome business and it would take us too long to teach you. Bosanquet is standing by, but it may take us till lunch time before we have it fixed. Go for a walk," he concluded helpfully, and straightaway returned to his work.

I looked at him, in a woeful admiration. This was ten o'clock on the fifteenth, and there was Granby spelling out word by word a warning of what might be happening somehow, somewhere, on this very day. To the last he would hang upon this unknown event, hoping against hope till the sun went down or the news of some unimagined disaster burst upon us all.

"The Ides of March are come," I said softly.

Granby looked up and his blue eyes were gleaming.

"Aye, Cæsar," he answered promptly, "but not gone."

I spent a solitary morning wandering round the Greek theatre, the Church of Our Lady and the exquisite cloisters of St. Trophime. In the cloisters, one of the lovely places of the earth, I spent more than an hour in the sunlight. The slender pillars, with their romanesque capitals, carved when Godfrey de Bouillon and the great

Count Raymond of St. Gilles only a few miles away in the Camargues and our own Robert, son of the Conqueror, were storming the Holy City of Jerusalem and the magic era of the Crusades had begun, glowed with the freshness of a younger world. I looked long at the dim half-worn figures of the soldiers who guard the tomb of Christ, in coats of mail of the pattern that men had worn on the morning of Senlac or Dorylæum, at the green grass of the little square and the noble tower of the church beyond. Here indeed was solace and refreshment, but I sought in vain to recapture the spirit of the place where I had so often mused and felt at peace. That twisted and fantastic figure carved upon the stone capitals before which I stood suddenly assumed a fatal likeness to the face of Caramac. In the tourist who blundered into the cloister, guidebook in hand, I saw the false, efficient Richards; the little man who offered postcards beside the door was surely the twin brother of General Tanyi.

Suddenly I could bear the lovely place no more. I turned and hurried forth, making my way through the narrow streets to the square in front of St. Trophime and so, turning to the left, down to the broad boulevard in which our hotel was to be found.

I made my way, in an ill mood, through the laughing Provençal crowd. Women of all ages, all curiously alike, with the Arlesian headdress of white, starched linen protruding from a broad band of velvet and worn coquettishly on the crown of the head, streamed across the roadway from side to side. The city was in full festival. Traffic was impossible. Holiday was in the air. The men, in short black coats, some with coloured paper

caps and flowers in their buttonholes, stood about laughing or sat drinking in front of the cafés, and, at one of them, in a sun-drenched corner was a great gathering of lean brown-faced men from Camargues who brought with them from their solitary homes the tang of the salt pans and bitter lakes gathered round the mouth of the Rhône. All this I saw as from a distance, unwarmed and without a thrill. I could not, as at other times, mingle with the jolly rout and endeavour, poor cold foreigner that I was, to take my share of the earth with them.

That day it was beyond me.

I climbed the few steps to the hotel, crossed the terrace and walked into the lounge. Granby was nowhere to be seen. Entering the lift I was taken to the second floor. I reached his room and opened the door.

Granby and Bosanquet were still at the table where I had left them.

"Let's make quite certain we have got it right," Bosanquet was saying.

"Check it while I read it," answered Granby.

They looked up at my entry, but after that brief glance at me they seemed scarcely to know I was there.

"The League of Discontent," read Granby slowly, "has been formed among the racial and linguistic minorities of Eastern Europe and the Balkans. Its main headquarters are in Ishtip and there are subsidiary branches in Castua, Minkachevo, Stanislavoff — Its object is to secure the overthrow of the existing régime throughout that part of Europe, more especially in Poland, Czechoslovakia, the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes and Roumania. The chief organiser is General Tanyi, the Hungarian patriot. Closely associated with

him are Rykov of Jugoslavia, Dusmans of Upper Silesia and Lazlo of Transylvania."

"Are you sure of the names?" said Bosanquet in a sharp tone.

Granby again recited and Bosanquet added a note to the draft of a telegram which was lying under his right hand.

Granby continued reading.

Much of what I heard was unintelligible and a certain amount of it I cannot even now reveal, for the ramifications of that great plot have not yet been fully laid bare. But in its main lines it was clear enough. A special storm battalion or shock company had been formed in each centre, supplied with gas bombs manufactured by Caramac and distributed by Richards.

The obscure references which I had overheard lying under the cypress hedge by the demilune began to take form and significance. The plot was beginning to be clear. Nothing less than a mobilisation of the forces of political discontent among the minorities of Europe. What, however, was the motive? For Tanyi it was plain enough, but what interest had Caramac, Richards and the Count de Vallantré in the grievances of the Magyars or the Macedonians in Serbia?

"At a given moment" — it was Granby reading again — "the attack will be launched. The final details are not yet settled. General Tanyi comes to the château on the thirteenth and I think the event is fixed for the fifteenth. The signal — "

He paused.

"Yes," I said, "the signal. What is it, Granby?"

He looked at Bosanquet and smiled.

"It's all right, Geoffrey," he said. "We sent a telegram to Berlin half an hour ago. The signal," he continued, reading again from the paper, "will be the assassination of Herr Müller, the German Minister for Foreign Affairs."

I looked at them in silence suddenly, and, as it seemed, unaccountably uneasy. There was something I half remembered. I crossed the room and rang the bell, telling the waiter who answered it to bring me the morning edition of the *Petit Provençal*.

"What's the matter, Geoffrey?" said Granby as we waited for him to come back.

"Nothing, perhaps," I answered.

The waiter returned and I took from his hands the newspapers. My eye fell at once upon a black headline that ran right across the page.

"It is Herr Müller," I asked, "who is to be — murdered?"

"Yes," said Granby.

I laid the paper down.

"Herr Müller is in Arles," I said quietly.

"What?" exclaimed Bosanquet.

Granby, already on his feet, had seized the newspaper.

I pointed to the headline.

"Herr Müller," I said, "is taking a holiday in the south of France and the town of Arles is entertaining him to-day as an outward sign of the improved relations between France and Germany."

As I spoke there came a rattle of drum taps from the street, followed by a burst of music. I moved to the window. A large procession was escorting an open carriage.

In the back of it sat two gentlemen with rosy faces. One of them wore a silk hat which he removed at intervals from a bald head as he inclined this way and that to the cheering crowd.

The procession was moving in the direction of the Roman arena.

There was a movement beside me. Granby was at my elbow, with his hand upon my arm.

"Yes," I said, "that is Herr Müller. It is past noon and he is still alive."

CHAPTER XVIII

I ATTEND AN ASSASSINATION

Granby let go of my arm and thrust me lightly aside almost into the arms of Bosanquet. His lean face projected a moment through the window as he stared at the passing show. He stood there motionless for perhaps ten seconds, then abruptly, in two strides, he was across the room.

"Come on," he said over his shoulder, "no time to lose."

"What are we going to do?" asked Bosanquet as we made towards the door.

Granby, turning on the threshold, faced us both.

"I'm going straight to the arena," he said. "We can't hope to get within speaking distance of Herr Müller in the street. You had better come with me, Geoffrey. You can pacify the mayor while I talk to the minister. Bosanquet, get hold of the police. You carry more weight than I do in these parts. Play the British consul for all you're worth and get the bobbies all stepping lively."

So he issued his instructions. His eyes were alight with excitement or dismay, I could not tell which, and his mouth was set in a thin, hard line.

We sped downstairs two at a time.

"Stop a moment," I gasped, when we reached the lounge. "Where is Diana?"

"Carstairs is looking after Diana," he replied. "Still

showing her the tombs, I suppose. And then they will lunch together.

"No, sir," he continued in French to a man who happened to be in his way, "there is no need to apologise. It was my fault entirely."

We were now well upon our way down the broad boulevard, under the plane trees, our feet falling softly in the thick dust. Soon, however, we were brought up short. The crowd was immense. It filled the boulevard, flowed along the pavements and among the little tables of the cafés. It was in the best of humours, but mortally slow to move and the carriage containing the mayor of Arles and the German Foreign Secretary was at least four or five hundred yards in front of us. We caught a faint glimpse of it turning to the left, past the walls of the town, as we plunged into the crowd.

"Hopeless," said Granby in my ear.

He addressed an abrupt question to a man beside us, a brawny fellow in a leather coat and slouch hat, with a face the colour of mahogany.

"They go to the arena, is it not so?" he asked.

"Yes," said the man, "they are going to the arena. But first they make a tour of the town."

"Have they then had lunch?" I said, looking at my watch, which showed it to be barely a quarter to one, "or do they first return for it?"

"The German minister," replied the man, "has to leave at four o'clock, so that he and Monsieur le Maire must have lunched early. The *course* at the arena begins at half-past one."

We thanked him and began to push our way through the crowd.

"What's the quickest way to the arena?" said Granby.

"Through the public gardens and past the Greek theatre," I replied.

"Lead on," said Granby.

We pushed and struggled through the crowd. Fortunately every one was in a holiday mood, but we left a good few ruffled tempers behind us. Even so we advanced but slowly. Granby had me fast by the arm but said nothing. We moved, a foot at a time, through the press. Smiling faces were everywhere. Now it was an old man, grey beard stained with tobacco juice, his head thrown back, laughing at some new, more probably ancient joke; a man and his girl, she in a black shawl with the white Arlesian coif on her black hair, pressed close together in the crowd, surrounded and yet alone; a huge farmer in dusty clothes and a broad hat, with a fat child perched on his shoulder waving toy windmills of coloured feathers; three old women, their faces wrinkled like winter apples, lost and rather frightened in all the press, but resolute to see everything they could.

Soon, however, we reached the pleasure gardens, where we were able to make better progress. They are built on the side of a slope where once stood the wall of the town and indeed parts of it still remain. We hurried through the tall cedars and cypress, reached a door in the iron railing at the top and, moving through, found ourselves next to the ancient theatre, serene and deserted in the sunshine. Here lingers the spirit of Greece, whose ghost still haunts this furthest west of her sanctuaries, recalling, with its two broken columns,

the time when Greek merchants built Marseilles and traded with the fabulous lands of Gaul. The place caught at me.

And so, eventually, we found ourselves on the outskirts of the arena itself. It rises from a huge circular pit. The road for more than half its length encircles it at the level of its first storey. Weather-beaten and grey, curiously light in its effect, the huge circle of stone sprang from the thick dust. Flags fluttered from the niches and towers, and a whirl of pigeons darted and balanced in the blue air above it.

The crowd in the street below us was thicker than in the boulevard and the arena was vibrating with the hum and murmur of those who had already passed the gates. We thrust our way as best we could towards an open space kept clear by a light wooden paling. Fringing it stood at intervals a number of *gendarmes*.

"We must get as close as we can," said Granby. "We will stop Herr Müller if it is possible to do so and follow him into the arena if we can't. The critical moment will be when he leaves the carriage. Keep your eyes open, Geoffrey, and, if you see any faces from the château, give tongue *prontissimo*."

He had barely finished speaking when a clangor of bugles filled the noonday and round the bend of the arena swept a platoon of infantry in column of fours. It was preceded by a bugle band playing one of the bustling French army marches and it halted in the open space reserved for the alighting of Herr Müller and the mayor. The buglers continued their march till they stood beneath the lowest arches of the arena itself. Then they faced about and, putting their bugles once more to

their lips, blew a superb fanfaronade. At the same moment, on a word from their officer, the infantry formed into two lines and, holding their rifles crossways in front of them, began with good-humoured determination to press the crowd back from the reserved space. All this had happened very quickly and almost before we knew it we were hopelessly jammed in a mob of Arlesians and quite unable to move.

There came a jangling of bits and a sound of hoofs. The open carriage appeared in the space set apart. The crowd began to roar; the mayor and the German foreign minister descended; the officer in charge of the infantry saluted with his drawn sword.

Two portly figures in frock coats and silk hats stood for an instant in the sunshine, looking about them and bowing to right and left. They moved forward into the shadow of the arch.

"Thank God for that," said Granby, and I saw the beads of sweat gleaming on his forehead.

"What are you going to do now?" I asked.

"Respond to pressure," said Granby as, lifted off our feet, we were borne irresistibly forward on the surge of the crowd.

"Where do they keep the royal box or its equivalent?" he asked an instant later.

"It's usually on this side of the arena," I answered, "opposite the *toril* from which the bulls enter the ring."

"I see," said Granby. "And the best seats, I suppose, are on the same side and as near to the box as possible?"

"Sure to be," I answered.

"Well, come along," he said. "All we can do is to get as close to him as we can."

It took us ten minutes or more to push our way to one of the little wooden ticket boxes which stood in the shadow of the arena. There we bought two of the most expensive seats for fifty francs, and, passing through a turnstile, found ourselves on a sandy floor in a dark corridor of stone. At the end of it we caught a glimpse of a low wooden barricade painted a dark red, and beyond a stretch of burning yellow sand.

We turned to the right where an arrow pointed us forward to the "*premières places.*"

The arena itself is oval, built on the uniform plan used in all Roman circuses — the ring being enclosed by a series of arches built in rising tiers. The arches supporting each storey form passages or corridors, larger at the outer end and gradually diminishing as they slope down towards the centre. Access to the seats is obtained from circular passages in the structure itself. The great building was used in the Middle Ages as a fortress and two mediæval towers still stand upon its summit. It is, in consequence, much ruined. Many of the passages, especially those on the ground floor, are dark and deserted and the arched approaches yawn black and empty. Walking down these passages is not a little eerie. The past shrinks back into these caverns as we hurry towards the light and clamour of the sun-drenched arena itself, where the present is lord and master.

I emphasise the desolate and ruined character of these approaches so that you may understand what follows.

We walked up a flight of temporary wooden steps, from coolness and shadow into the sharp light of day. We emerged to find ourselves beside a row of broad

wooden chairs, about halfway up the shady side of the arena.

I touched Granby on the arm. The box — if I may so describe the railed-off space in which the German foreign minister and the mayor were seated — was perhaps thirty yards away to our right and slightly above us. It was draped with the colours of France and Germany and the mayor and the foreign minister had just taken their places. The cheaper seats in the arena were already packed and the roar and bustle of the holiday crowd made it difficult at times to hear oneself speak.

The performance in the ring was due to begin and a damp bill of the programme was thrust into my hand by a swarthy fellow in a shirt and trousers to whom I mechanically handed a franc. I glanced at it more out of habit than for any other reason. The "Arlesian fanfare" was already, it seemed, performing an overture. The bandmaster was waving his stick, and his men, to judge by their faces, were making a merry din, but scarcely a note could be heard above the noise of the crowd. The fanfare, I observed, was to be followed immediately by a *farandole*, the native dance of Provence, to be performed for the special benefit of Herr Müller. Then the fun would begin. Six magnificent bulls, so ran the sheet, from the famous *ganaderia* of M. J. V. Costacaud of the Camargues, would enter the ring in succession, each bearing a cockade between his horns. The third bull, Carlos by name, would carry no less than two thousand francs between what the programme described as his "magnificent defences."

I noted these things in an odd, subsidiary kind of way, as two long files, alternately men and women, tripped

into the arena and began the dance. My more immediate attention was elsewhere.

There were, I suppose, some forty or fifty chairs between us and those which were nearest to the president's box and, needless to remark, they were all of them occupied. The space, moreover, between the rows was small. Clearly it would be difficult to reach our objective.

"We have entered the straight," said Granby. "God help their toes."

He plunged forward resolutely and I did my best to follow. The noise in the arena had fallen somewhat, for many of the audience had now become interested in the dance. The people over whom we were trampling and the spectators nearest us soon, however, lost all delight in the spectacle and gave us their undivided attention. Granby scattered "Pardons" right and left and repeated continuously that he had a message for Monsieur le Maire. But it was heavy going and when the *farandole* came to an end we were still eight or ten seats away from the presidential box.

I could see Herr Müller very distinctly now. His ugly clever face, with the shrewd eyes, was thrust forward over the edge of the box, as he smiled at the ring and applauded with large white hands. This was for him a great occasion, a symbol of the success of his policy, a sign that the secular enmity of France and Germany was giving place to better understanding and mutual tolerance. As if to give point to my thoughts, a man in the crowd below us, with a red muffler round his neck, rose and waved a hand triumphantly.

"*Il n'y aura plus de guerre,*" he shouted. "*Vive la France; vive l'Allemagne,*" and his sentiments

were warmly echoed by his immediate neighbours.

By this time, however, Granby had reached the edge of the president's box and was talking to a *gendarme* who was standing beside it. I could not hear what he was saying, for the chatter of fourteen thousand people gathered in the great arena made it impossible.

I was standing now at the very end of the row of seats, wedged between a plethoric farmer in black broadcloth with a startling tie and a bottle of beer in his left hand, and a large block of marble, perhaps a remnant of the seat upon which, for all I knew, a Roman procurator had sat and watched the dying Gaul.

"*Il n'y a pas de place, Monsieur.* Fix to us the peace. Name of a name!" said the farmer.

But I paid him no attention. Granby's lean face, above and just beyond me, was thrust over the barricade. He had caught the *gendarme* by the sleeve and was pointing straight at the mayor.

Then a flash of colour caught my eye and I perceived that a number of men in blue trousers or soiled white ducks had entered the arena and were selling oranges. Their method of business was to toss up the gleaming fruit to the purchaser who threw the money down to them in the ring.

I stood there watching the scene, deaf to the protests of my neighbour, as the oranges flashed up in answer to the demands of the thirsty Provençals. Granby had hoisted himself onto the tier just above ours and his feet were therefore level with my waist. So we remained a moment while he continued to reason with the *gendarme*.

Then suddenly the patience of my neighbour in broadcloth gave way.

"*Coquin de bon sort*," he roared. "I have told you a thousand times there are no places. It is not possible that you do not perceive it," and, seizing me by the waist, he gave me a push, intending, I presume, to pass me on to his next door neighbour. Instinctively I clutched at Granby for support and his hold on the balustrade above me was precarious. Together we lost our balance and together we fell outwards, landing on the shoulders of the people immediately below us.

We got to our feet with difficulty among a number of angry individuals seated immediately below the box of the president. Our fall had by a happy chance brought us within six feet of the German minister. Granby did not lose any time and, almost before I had got to my feet or realised my whereabouts, he had not only attracted Herr Müller's attention, but was speaking to him rapidly in German.

I saw the minister lean his head sideways to catch what Granby was saying.

I wondered vaguely what would happen next. Granby was delivering his message. But would he be believed and would Herr Müller consent, in any case, to withdraw?

I waited anxiously.

It was then that my attention was diverted by the efforts of one of the orange sellers in the ring fifty feet or so below us. He wore a broad hat; his face was red and the moustache on his upper lip was black. He had just thrown an orange to a man seated a little to my left and was stooping to pick up the coin which had been flung to him in payment. Then he straightened himself and lifted his face toward the presidential box so that I saw it very clearly.

"No," I said to myself, "it isn't possible. That man is thirty years younger."

But I was wrong and knew that I was wrong. There was no mistaking that drooping eyelid and the small scar on the forehead.

I seized Granby by the elbow and pointed.

"Tanyi," I shouted above the general noise, "General Tanyi — down there."

Granby broke off his conversation and looked quickly down. The orange seller, groping in his basket, had taken an orange. I saw his mouth set in a fierce line. His hand went back and in an instant the golden globe came flying straight at the box.

There was a violent movement beside me and Granby's left elbow caught me on the side of the head. The orange flashed past me, but not into the box. Granby was stretched to his full height and his right hand caught the orange as it fell. Without an instant's pause he swung round. His eyes were blazing and there was not an atom of colour in his face. From the orange in his hand a thin, almost imperceptible vapour was streaming and I became aware of a faint whiff of perfume, not unlike jasmine. Then Granby's right hand went back, as Tanyi's had done a moment — could it have been only a moment? before; straight the orange flew, above the heads of the astonished German minister and mayor, hitting at last the stone margin of one of the many disused entrances to the arena which yawned black and remote along the ruins of the topmost tier.

Thence it rolled slowly forward and vanished into a black void.

CHAPTER XIX

I GO ABOARD THE LUGGER

No one in all that huge assembly realised in the least what had happened. A man in the arena had thrown an orange to the presidential box. That was an impertinence, and an indignant spectator had intercepted it and hurled it away.

But Granby's hand was on my arm.

"There goes Tanyi," he said. "Keep him in view."

I hesitated.

"Aren't you going to explain?" I asked.

"Stop thief — hue and cry — prompt arrest. — Not on your life. Take too much time. Besides I'm not after Tanyi. It's Caramac I want to see."

Without another word he jumped from the row of seats in which he stood, to the storey below. Thence we scrambled from tier to tier, moving down towards the ring. I had no ears for the hubbub which broke out behind us nor for the angry comments of the spectators through whom we forced our way. I noticed, however, as we went, that a large number of police were advancing towards the president's box. At the head of them was Bosanquet, very resolute and very red.

We reached the arena before Tanyi had succeeded in leaving it. He had marvellously kept his head, realising that his only chance was to remain as one of the crowd of hawkers and officials who were going about their

business beside him. He was moving quietly but rapidly towards an exit in the far side of the arena.

The gap between the front seats and the actual bull ring is, I suppose, about six feet wide. The seats of the old amphitheatre were far higher than is usually the case in a modern bull ring, presumably to protect the front rank of spectators in the old Roman days from any risk of attack from the lions and tigers. It was a formidable barrier and we had to sling ourselves over the marble edge, cling on with our hands and drop. We arrived breathless in the passage between this marble wall and the wooden barrier used by the bullfighters. Granby was over that barrier like a *torero* and I was not far behind him.

A second later we were running across the sand of the arena.

"You understand," said Granby, as we went. "We're going to mark him to ground. He is our only chance of finding Caramac, Count and Company."

Tanyi was now some fifty yards away. I don't think he had realised till then that we were after him. Our running, however, made us conspicuous and suddenly he saw us coming. He was within ten yards of the barrier when he did so and the sight of us was too much for his nerve.

He abandoned his oranges and bolted for the exit. He reached it with about twenty yards to spare. In his way, blocking the passage, was a press photographer preparing his tripod for the show. Tanyi did not pause. The little man cannoned violently into the obstacle and laid low the Fourth Estate; the legs of the tripod, emblem of its vigilance, spreading out in all directions

like an ungainly starfish, Tanyi, not stopping to apologise, slipped quickly to one side and darted into one of the openings leading to the interior of the amphitheatre which I have already described.

I was now in advance of Granby who, in his haste, had momentarily become entangled with the tripod or its operator — I had no time to notice which.

Abruptly I plunged into the deep gloom of the ancient corridor. The sudden change from the glare outside blinded me and I paused to see where I was going. That was a lucky movement. Perhaps it saved my life. For suddenly from the darkness there gleamed two blazing eyes and a menacing black shadow came flying. I raised my right arm to protect my head. The blow caught me just above the elbow, knocking me sideways up against the rough stone. I felt suddenly sick with pain and caught a rapid glimpse of the face of Archimedes. Something loose and black like a snake was swinging from his hand. Then Granby appeared in the opening behind me and Archimedes loped away down the passage in the wake of Tanyi.

I staggered from the wall and clutched at Granby.

"Archimedes," I said breathlessly. "Be careful."

He passed me without a word and I stumbled after him.

Now I was at the end of the passage in the broad light of day. The arena is surrounded by an iron paling, fencing it from the open road, in which there are not many gates. Granby had turned to the right and I followed him round the curve. We had run not more than twenty yards when we saw Archimedes and General Tanyi coming towards us. Archimedes still had in his

hand the sandbag with which he had struck me. They were coming, as I have said, towards us, but unfortunately they were outside the arena and the iron bars were between us. Archimedes grinned broadly as he passed. He had his hand on the arm of the general, who was breathing heavily and seemed tired.

I stopped dead, but Granby hurried on and I started after him again.

A minute later we came to a gate in the iron railing, the same gate by which we had entered not an hour ago. The ticket office was now deserted. We pushed through the turnstile and at that very moment I caught sight of an open touring car passing at a high speed on the road above us not fifty yards away. Archimedes was at the wheel and Tanyi was on the back seat, mopping his face with a handkerchief.

"Quick," shouted Granby and pointed.

An open taxi with a driver seated at the wheel was drawn up within a few yards of where we stood.

"See that car," said Granby, and he pointed to the cloud of dust which was moving like a small whirlwind down the blazing road. "Follow it. The remuneration shall be of the most sufficient."

The chauffeur looked up from his wheel doubtfully.

"It's a big car," he said, as he pressed the self-starter, "but I will do my best."

The taxi started with a jerk. A hundred yards further on we had a stroke of luck. Tanyi's car had been held up by a covered cart belonging to some gypsies, which was ambling slowly along without regard to any rules or regulations, and Archimedes was just edging past him as we came within twenty yards. We were thus able

to see him turn to the right down the narrow main street which leads to the suburb of Trinquetaille. By the time we had ourselves slipped past the gypsy cart, he was at the end of the street. Our driver did his best, but we could not shorten appreciably the distance between us. Soon we turned to the right again, thundered over the hideous girder bridge across the Rhône, and then switched so abruptly to the left that I thought the car would overturn. In another five minutes we were free of the last houses and heading straight across the road, towards the Camargues, in the direction of the coast.

"Where on earth is he going?" I said, nursing my throbbing arm as the taxi bounded and jumped about all over the road.

The springs were poor and the road was worse; and I sighed for the Rolls.

"I can't say," answered Granby. "Les Saintes Maries de la Mer or Aiguesmortes. We shall know pretty soon."

"Can't we go faster?" I asked.

Granby shook his head.

"The man is doing his best," he answered, "but you can't expect a Citroën to overtake an Hispaño."

Fortunately the road was fairly straight for it ran across the level plain of the Camargues, a wild and lonely land, part of it under vines, but mostly a waste of marsh over which bulls wander at liberty and even flamingoes build their nests. A cloud of dust half a mile ahead marked the passage of our quarry. We followed it as fast as we could, under the burning afternoon sun, past clumps of plane trees and limes, with an occasional oak or a rare hedge of black cypress protecting the vegetable gardens attached to some isolated farm or

mas, as they call it in that country. We had by now lost sight of the pillar of dust which was our only sign-post and at Albaron, a straggling hamlet situated at an intersection of crossroads, we had to stop a moment to make enquiries. We had no great difficulty however. An aged dame, holding in her hands the limp body of a cock, was gazing wrathfully down the road.

"The bandit — the bandit," she said, as we drew level with her.

"Have you seen a big yellow car?" began Granby, but he had no need to finish his sentence. Vindictively the old lady displayed her dead.

"They have killed Alphonse," she said, and pointed a lean quivering finger to the road upon our left.

I dived into my pocket and, as the car swung round quickly and gathered speed, I dropped a twenty-franc note over the side. From behind shrill blessings sped us on our way.

Once out again on the road, running now with the Little Rhône on our right hand, for the Rhône when it reaches the Camargues splits up into a hundred small streams, we caught another glimpse of dust ahead of us. Our driver was now infected with the spirit of the chase, or, as he preferred to call it, *l'ivresse du sport*, and was determined to keep that pillar of dust in sight though his car shook to pieces on the road. The surface was a chain of continuous potholes, and at any moment I expected the back axle to go.

"It's no good," I said at last, after a savage bump had knocked my injured arm against the side of the car so that I almost cried out with pain. "It's no good, Granby. We can't possibly keep it up."

"I know that," he snapped, "but we have only got to see which road they take."

The driver pointed in front of him.

"They are making for Aiguesmortes," he said. "See, Messieurs."

True enough, in the golden sunlight, we could see that the dust was blowing further to the right. We slowed down a little to take the sharp corner short of Pioch where the road branches to Aiguesmortes. Then we picked up again and presently clanked over a rough timber bridge laid on pontoons chained together, an engagingly primitive structure which creaked and groaned as we crossed it.

"We have got them now," I said. "This road runs straight to the sea."

Granby shook his head as we roared past the grey farm surrounded by pine trees called Montcalm.

"There is another turn," he reminded me, "just short of Aiguesmortes. They might double back and make for Nîmes."

We ran for another half-hour. I glanced at my watch. It was not yet four o'clock. The blazing autumn sun shone down from a cloudless sky. The dust rose in swathes about us. It was over my face and hands and in every part of the car. I felt like a figure in a nightmare. But still we went, crashing and bumping over that awful road, through a still land, deserted and indifferent as only nature can be.

"Ah," breathed Granby at last, sinking back in the seat beside me. The suspense was smoothed from his face, as he pointed with his left hand.

"They have taken the road to Aiguesmortes," he said.

"There is no way back but this one. And from Aiguesmortes there is only the narrow road that runs straight down to the sea."

"Le Grau du Roi," I said.

"Exactly."

"Then the count must have a yacht," I inferred.

"I suspected as much," said Granby, "as soon as Archimedes took this road. There is probably a fast motor boat lying beside the quay waiting to whisk little Tanyi away and aboard the lugger. I therefore propose to get busy at Aiguesmortes. It will take Archimedes ten minutes to get down from there to the sea — just time enough for me to telephone to Le Grau du Roi and have him arrested before he can embark. He has served us well — led us straight to the lair. Once we know the count is aboard ship on the wrong side of Gibraltar, his number is up. We'll have half a dozen destroyers looking out for him before nightfall."

A few minutes later Aiguesmortès suddenly came into view. Even at that moment, thrilling with the *ivresse du sport*, I felt a swift return of the amazement with which I had, some two or three years previously, first seen that extraordinary city. It lies off the beaten track of the tourist and strikes you to the heart without preparation or advertisement. Four square and frowning, with towers and walls and gates "touched not of time," it stands in the middle of the green plain. There were six thousand inhabitants in the days of St. Louis when he built it as a naval base for his crusades, and there are six thousand still to-day. History, in this remote corner of France, has stood still. It has scarcely touched the huge walls or the squalor within.

We rolled slowly beneath the great arch with its grooves for a double portcullis and so into the town. Granby stopped the car in the square by the statue of St. Louis.

"Now for the telephone," he said. "We will start again in five minutes. Get a drink, Geoffrey."

I needed no second bidding, but jumped from the car and walked briskly to the Hôtel de St. Louis, where my dear friend Madame Vouland received me with open arms.

"But what a state is this in which Monsieur arrives," she exclaimed, "and why did Monsieur not give me warning. I always wish to do of my best."

"Alas, Madame," I answered, "I am on a mission and I cannot stay. Give me of your *picpoul* and I will depart."

Two minutes later I walked away from her hotel, clasping two bottles of the golden wine. I reached the car just as Granby issued from the tiny *gendarmerie*, accompanied by the local policeman in his shirt sleeves.

"*Bien, Monsieur, bien,*" the representative of the law was saying. "Everything shall be done. I will draw a cordon across the road; no cars shall pass. But that is hardly needful. My *camarade* at the Grau de Roi will do the necessary. He is ready and courageous, is my comrade Jules. That is a brave little town by the sea and the fisher folk will bear a hand. Your ruffians are by now arrested. They wear the bracelets of infamy. But I will take every precaution and when the *commissaire* comes hither from Arles — "

"Yes, yes," said Granby, who had been waiting in vain for an opportunity to stem this tide of southern elo-

quence, "but I will be getting along if you don't mind. See you later."

The *gendarme* smiled and swept a hand over his curling moustache.

"I understand," he said, "I was once in England — in your Birmingham — you wish the tail of the fox, is it not so?"

I heard no more, for at a sign from Granby our hired driver, his eyes now big with amazement, had let in the clutch and we were once more upon our way, bumping over the cobbles of the narrow street and so to another gate in the city wall, whence we emerged to find ourselves on the road which runs parallel to the canal of Aiguesmortes, down to the little fishing village of Le Grau du Roi by the sea. The great ramparts, orange-grey in the evening light, dropped away behind us. This, then, was to be the end.

"Now then, young fellow-me-lad," came the voice of Granby. "Where's that *picpoul* we've heard so much about?"

I handed him the bottle. He drank fair and returned it to me.

"Yes," he said, echoing my own thought, "I think it's all over now. 'Sudden the worst turns best,' as the poet says. The police headquarters at Le Grau de Roi have been warned. It consists of a single *gendarme* but all men of goodwill will be invited to assist. By the time we arrive a dozen able-bodied seamen will be sitting on the chest of Archimedes, and the motor boat, if any, will be in the hands of a prize crew."

"Granby," I said, "what is it all about, anyway? What is this League of Discontent?"

"Probably the most dangerous combination in Europe at the moment," he replied gravely.

"I am not an international politician," I observed, "I don't understand these things."

Granby smiled bitterly.

"All the better for you," he answered. "But you need not be an international politician to understand this League of Discontent. You've probably heard a good deal of the great problem of the minorities in Europe. There are now scattered all over this old continent little groups of men to whom the Treaty of Versailles and the other Peace Treaties brought ruin, hunger and despair. The politicians and professors pricking out the new frontiers upon their maps at the Quai d'Orsay in 1919 made a neat job of it on paper. But there still had to be Czechs in Hungary, Slavs in Styria and Albanians in Greece — all resentful and suspicious. Many of them have nothing to lose and, when a man has nothing to lose, he is dangerous, Geoffrey, if you put a weapon in his hand. And that's what Caramac has done. He has armed them by groups and he has organised their several discontents, so that instead of an isolated act of rebellion here and there the European authorities may be confronted simultaneously with a general uprising. Serbs and Macedonians have nothing in common with Germans and Poles except that they all hanker alike to be revenged upon their new masters. Caramac hoped to use this common motive. There are men like Tanyi in every country east of the Rhine. We have known of several dangerous combinations for years — the sub-Carpathian movement, which includes Bessarabia, the tail of Czechoslovakia and most of Eastern Galicia.

Their headquarters are at Stanislavoff. They of course were to be used as tools, playing the game of Caramac, Richards and the count."

"But what *is* their game?" I asked. "I don't see how any of them can profit by unseating half the governments of Europe."

"The count is a queer case," said Granby. "You remember? Power is — power."

The scene came back to me vividly as he spoke. The slim pillars of the demilune, the flowing wine, the golden plates, the magnificent liveries of the Negroes and the count in his white satin, moodily trying to express the threatening, ill-considered thoughts of a man who has not learned how to control his money or his desires.

"Caramac," continued Granby, "is a dying man. All he cares for is revenge upon the society which has cast him out. Richards is rather more difficult, but I think I see his motive. He made his fortune during the war and immediately afterwards — mostly by speculation in troubled markets. He is now a ruined man and it is difficult to make quick money in a stable world. His best chance is to upset the financial apple cart. He wants his Rolls-Royce again and his office in the City and his fat cigars and his horses at Epsom and Newmarket. Tanyi, of course, is different — the only one of the four with a direct interest in the minorities for themselves alone. He wants his estates and to see his compatriots masters in the land where they ruled for so many hundreds of years."

"Why did they choose Herr Müller as a victim?" I asked.

"Germany," he replied, "is the biggest power inter-

ested in minorities. The murder would have been attributed to the Poles. That would have been a fine send-off for the risings elsewhere."

"But here we are," he concluded abruptly.

The car slowed down as he spoke. We had reached the beginning of Le Grau du Roi. The road from Aigues-mortes runs beside the canal all the way down to the sea and we had now arrived within four hundred yards of the shore. The opening of the canal is fringed on either side with the houses of the fishermen and their primitive craft. The main street of the village, as I remembered, was about a hundred yards to the left of the quayside.

I looked eagerly about me, but there was no sign of anything abnormal. The quay was empty, but that was not unusual. The fish had all come in and was already on its way to Nîmes. There were a few children playing in the dust, a few nets drying in the afternoon sun and a few women sitting at their open doors.

The car stopped at the end of a little street that ran back from the quay. Granby jumped to the ground.

"Coming, Geoffrey?" he asked.

"Of course," I answered. "But where?"

"*Gendarmerie,*" he said. "It's just round the corner."

I followed him up the little side street, past a wine-shop with two iron tables by the door and a rude sign painted on the white plaster of the wall above it, and turning the corner, found myself looking at a row of small white houses on the further side of the road. On one of them was scrawled in black chalk the familiar device: *Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité.* That must be the police station.

There was not a soul within view and Granby paused a moment.

"No sign of the promised mobilisation," he said. "We will just look in here and then go straight down to the sea front."

We crossed the road and stood in front of the *gendarmerie*. The door was closed. Granby hesitated a moment and then knocked smartly on the panel with his knuckles.

Nothing happened.

"No time to lose," said Granby.

He opened the door and we passed together into a narrow passage. To the left of it was a small room and in this room, sitting at a table, his tunic open at the neck for greater ease, was seated the sole representative of the might and majesty of France. This then was Jules, the ready and courageous.

But he did not rise to meet us or offer us any words of greeting, and the reasons for his strange behaviour were good and sufficient. Jules was tied fast in his chair; a gag was in his mouth; and sitting on the table beside him, swinging a comfortable leg, was Archimedes. At the same time I became aware of two Negroes covering Granby and myself from the opposite side of the room and of a third man in yachting rig standing by the window.

"Now, sar," came the voice of Archimedes, "resistance most foolish. Brains will be scattered at once. You come with me now and join the general."

Granby, still as a statue, looked from Archimedes to the bound and gagged figure in the chair.

"I perceive," he said, "that the local police are for the moment powerless to act. But you can't get away

with it, you know. Or have you perhaps declared war on France and captured one of her principal seaports?"

Archimedes grinned, but said nothing. Instead, he put his silver whistle to his lips and blew. There was a sound of rapid steps coming at the double and through the window I perceived a number of men dressed like the yachtsman beside it turning up outside.

There was an instant's silence. Then Granby shrugged his shoulders.

"Lead on," he said.

"One moment," continued Archimedes.

He beckoned to one of the Negroes who came forward searched us, removed Granby's automatic and roped our hands together behind our backs.

"That's better," said Archimedes. "Fall in, sars."

We passed into the street.

The men outside closed in quickly upon us and we were hustled rapidly down towards the sea. My mind was in a whirl. This was France and we were living in the twentieth century. Nevertheless we were cut off, isolated. This tiny portion of the territory of a first-class power had ceased to acknowledge the writ of sovereignty.

We turned a corner at the end of the street and approached the quay. There is a large hotel-café at the end of the jetty, with tables set beneath big umbrellas, an attempt on the part of the inhabitants to make of Le Grau du Roi a summer watering place. We came to an abrupt halt within five yards of it. There I beheld three waiters standing among the tables. They showed no sort of professional interest in our arrival however; and again the reason was obvious. All three had their

hands raised well above their heads. Then I perceived that half a dozen fishermen in rough overalls, with tanned faces and untended beards were in the same ridiculous position, while opposite them stood a line of swarthy natives — not Negroes this time — perhaps half a dozen of them, dressed all alike in white ducks and white peaked caps showing a glint of gold embroidery.

But my interest in the scene was brief, for, moored beside the quay, I next perceived a motor pinnace, gay with white paint and shining brass work. And standing in the stern sheets was General Tanyi, still in his disguise of the orange seller.

I was aware of a gentle push from behind and I moved forward, Granby beside me, past the fishermen and the waiters whose hands were lifted above us as in a parting benediction. Their faces showed frank bewilderment, but one or two bore signs of recent anger. At least the position now was clear. The whole village had been held up.

"Be careful, sars, of the steps," came the voice of Archimedes in my ear.

He urged us politely but firmly as he spoke down the half-dozen stone steps to the edge of the pinnace. We stepped aboard.

"Kindly sit down in the stern sheets," said Tanyi.

His voice was cold and calm like that of an officer on parade.

We did as we were bid, and at once the pinnace started, moving with a roar along the jetty, down the narrow harbour not fifty yards broad, a great wave crested with foam breaking from its cutwater. We had gone perhaps fifty yards when I heard a staccato

rattle of shots behind me. I turned my head. The black forces were retreating in perfect order towards another and larger pinnace drawn up to the side of the jetty, and they had fired over the heads of the waiters and fishermen to discourage any intention they might have of following them.

"Very neat, Archimedes," came the voice of General Tanyi, in tones of dry satisfaction. "I will mention your conduct when we get aboard."

"Thank you, sar," said Archimedes.

He moved forward into the bows. The craft upon which we were seated was nodding and dipping gently to a slight swell as we flew. We must have been doing at least thirty knots and before we had been going ten minutes I perceived the graceful lines of a large steam yacht anchored some miles off shore.

I looked anxiously at Granby. I had looked at him indeed more than once during our ignoble passage from the *gendarmerie* to the pinnace, but his expression had not encouraged either sympathy or comment. It held more of astonishment than anger and I was not surprised when he suddenly burst out.

"They were expecting us, Geoffrey, that's what beats me. They knew we were coming and we walked straight into it."

He was silent a moment and then added:

"No one could possibly have *guessed* we were coming, not even Caramac. Caramac *knew* — he knew in time to land this outfit and wait for us."

"He may have sent these men to rescue Tanyi," I pointed out. "Tanyi arrived and warned them we were close behind."

"Why should he hold up an entire village to get Tanyi away? All Tanyi needed was a quick car and a fast motor-boat. No, Geoffrey. This was arranged for our especial benefit."

Tanyi, whom for the moment we had forgotten, suddenly smiled.

"You have only yourself to blame, Colonel," he said. "You underrated the ability of a very remarkable man."

"I didn't credit him with television or second-sight — if that's what you mean," retorted Granby. "But you are right, General. I've been caught napping and I take it that we shall now be joining the house party on the count's well-appointed yacht — a private suite for every guest, and I hope mine has a bathroom."

"We shall be alongside in five minutes," said Tanyi.

He seemed in no way abashed by his failure to kill the German foreign minister earlier that afternoon. This, I supposed, was what it meant to be a fanatic. It mattered not a straw to him if one of the few statesmen with vision in Europe were choked to death at a public spectacle in the company of who knows how many other innocent victims. He cared only that the bitter wrongs of an infamous peace might be set right and the turbulent Hungarians, who had set their yoke so heavily upon the necks of Roumanian peasants, might put it there again. Nothing else was of any real account.

We drew up beside a smart companion ladder and, at a sign from Tanyi, we followed him up the steps. He gave a helping hand to Granby, for our wrists were still roped together, and the same kind office was performed for me by Archimedes.

"Good evening, gentlemen."

Jean Caramac was in his wheel chair on deck, a couple of Negro stewards in attendance behind him. To his right were Richards and the Count de Vallantré, drinking something golden and sparkling from deep glasses. Both were in white yachting suits and seemed very much at their ease.

"General Tanyi," said Caramac, "I'm glad to see you safe."

"Thank you, Doctor," said Tanyi.

He turned to the count.

"And now," he added, "if one of your men will show me to my cabin, I will get rid of this ridiculous disguise."

The count nodded and signed to one of the stewards, who led the general away.

My heart sank as he moved off. Tanyi was the only person aboard who might conceivably have shown us some goodwill. Fanatical he was, but something of a sportsman. The others I knew would have no mercy.

"So, my dear Colonel, and you too, Mr. Carroll," came the smooth voice of Caramac, "you have now your hearts' desire. What was it exactly? *I'm not after Tanyi. It's Caramac I want to see.*"

I looked at Granby in amazement. Those were the very words he had used as we had stood by the president's box in the ring at Arles. But Granby, I noted, was looking neither at me nor at Caramac. His eyes were raised to the wireless antennae of receiving apparatus stretched between the masts.

"Yes," said Caramac, "you have an excellent wireless delivery, Colonel Granby. A little familiar perhaps and rather hurried. But your brief conversation with

Mr. Carroll came over quite distinctly — along with the rest. I should perhaps add that Herr Müller delivered an excellent speech after you left."

"I see," said Granby, "they were broadcasting the show at Arles."

"And we," said Caramac, "were naturally — interested. I must confess that we had moments of anxiety. Archimedes in his zeal might easily have outstripped you and you might have chosen to stay in Aiguesmortes and mobilise the French authorities. I felt, however, that I might rely on your impetuous disposition to bring you down to the sea and I was not at all surprised when, about half an hour ago, I picked up your taxi in my field glasses running down from Aiguesmortes to Le Grau du Roi."

"Well, here we are," broke in Richards from his deck chair. "And I think we ought to be starting."

Caramac turned to the count.

"Perhaps you will give orders to the captain," he suggested.

The count rose and walked with Richards slowly away towards the bridge. It was then that my eyes, following his progress, caught something which in an instant wiped the meaning from all that was being said or done about me.

From a little window of a deck cabin just beyond the head of Caramac looked the face of Diana.

CHAPTER XX

I AM SUNK WITH ALL HANDS

Caramac turned painfully in his wheel chair and followed the direction of my gaze. A quiet smile lit up the pale dead face.

"Yes," he said, replying to my unspoken question, "your wife is here, Mr. Carroll. Her presence is a small concession which, I felt, was due to our kind host in return for his hospitality. Your friend, Mr. David Carstairs, appears to be a little morbid in his tastes. Not satisfied with showing Mrs. Carroll the tombs this morning, he must needs explore the deserted chapel at the end of the Aliscamps. Mrs. Carroll very sensibly preferred to remain outside in the sunshine. Archimedes did not neglect the opportunity. He was well acquainted with the sentiments of his master. Once aboard the lugger and the girl is mine."

"And Mr. Carstairs," said Granby. "Is he also aboard?"

Caramac shook his head.

"I am not a naturally vindictive man," he said softly, "I have no real quarrel with Mr. Carstairs, and he is now unable to do us any harm."

He paused a moment and drank from a tumbler at his side.

The sun was near its setting and the shadows of the two masts lay long across the white deck. A mile or

two in the offing half a dozen fishing boats were beating slowly against a light northeasterly breeze to make the harbour of Le Grau du Roi before nightfall. I looked incredulously at the drawn face of Granby, the brutish Negroes lounging against the bulwarks in their white ducks, and the crew — Arabs they seemed for the most part — who were busily moving about the decks.

Then came a light cough from Caramac.

"This, my friends," he said softly, "this, at last, is the end. You, Colonel Granby, have both won and lost. For your satisfaction, let me frankly own that the League of Discontent is at the moment in grievous peril. Some half-dozen of its leaders, I make no doubt, have even now been arrested, thanks to your energy and determination. The signal, planned with so much care for this afternoon, has not been given — again owing to your dexterity and presence of mind. All honour to you, Colonel, where it is due."

Caramac was leaning forward now, his hands lying lightly upon the arms of his chair.

"And now," he said, "you must pay the price — your own life and the life of your friend, Mr. Carroll. I do not know how long Mrs. Carroll will survive. That will depend on the count's favour and how she chooses to receive it, but the count, I may say, is not very constant in his attachments."

I looked round. Granby was standing a few yards off. Between us were two strong Negroes.

Caramac gently shook his head.

"No, my young friend," he said, "the instinct is natural, but neither violence nor wit can help you now. The devotion and resource of Archimedes and his men are

already known to you. The crew are of a different race, but equally unscrupulous in their loyalty. Once they were Arab slavers, the crew, in fact, of a dhow captured by the Count de Vallantré when he was young and slender. Contrary to the usual practice, they were not hanged. The count had always an eye to the future, and a natural sympathy with the bold and bad. So he ventured to give them a second chance and took them into his service."

"This is going to be a long inning, Doctor," said Granby. "But, pray continue."

Caramac smiled.

"I like your English phrases, Colonel. They breathe the spirit of the playing fields — flannelled fools at the wicket and all that sort of thing."

Then abruptly the smile died upon his lips and he leaned forward, his frail body charged with menace.

"Once," he said, "you were fortunate enough to break my schemes. You caused me to be sent to a barren rock, blazing in the midst of this pitiless sea," and his hand swept out as he spoke, embracing in a gesture the wide Mediterranean, placid in the evening light. "And now, again, you have brought my plans to naught, but this time there is a difference, and it is a difference that you will feel and that I intend you to feel. The League of Discontent, as I have said, is for the moment powerless, but it was founded on passions that will endure. The political masters of Europe — not a statesman among them — have forged an instrument which will plague them to the end of the chapter. Our League will rise again, though for the moment you have succeeded in taking away the means we would have used. That, how-

ever, for you or for me has ceased to be of vital interest. Neither you nor I will live to see that day."

He paused and resumed more quietly, for it cost him, as I could see, some effort to speak at all.

"We are putting out to sea," he continued. "The yacht will steam southward — our exact course is immaterial. Before dawn the ship will be scuttled. Her crew will take to the boats — the two motor pinnaces which have already been so useful. They will perhaps be captured, but their responsibility is limited. We, whose lives are forfeit, have other and surer means of escape."

He looked as he spoke towards the bows of the ship, and for the first time I noticed a large flying boat lashed to the forward deck.

"You," he continued softly, "will remain with the yacht. You will spend the night in the forehold, but I promise you this much. You shall go down on deck, bound, if you will, like Odysseus to the mast, though I am afraid there will be no sirens to sing to you in passing. The count very wisely left them behind before we came aboard."

He paused and looked at us for a moment, then added yet more softly: "There will be room on the flying boat for Mrs. Carroll."

I did not answer him, but inevitably my eyes turned towards the window of the deck cabin. Diana was no longer to be seen. I looked round wildly. There was no sign of the Count de Vallantré, of Richards, or of Tanyi. We were alone with the Negroes and Caramac.

At that moment, however, the count reappeared. He was followed by a short brown-skinned man about the

same height as Granby, enveloped surprisingly in an Arab burnous of spotless white. The Arab was shaking in every limb.

"This idiot Ahmed," said the count irritably, indicating the figure in the burnous, "hasn't yet sent any message to the island. My people will not, therefore, know when to expect us."

"Must we warn them?" enquired Caramac. "Don't forget that your message may be intercepted."

"Of course, I must warn them," replied the Count de Vallantré, still in the same irritable tone. "I don't choose to arrive at my estate unannounced. The place would be all at sixes and sevens."

Caramac shrugged his shoulders.

"Very well," he answered. "Warn them, if you must, but kindly refrain from doing so immediately."

"When do we leave the yacht?" enquired the count.

"At dawn," answered Caramac, "that is to say, about half-past four."

"Then I shall tell him to send the message at about three o'clock," replied the count.

Caramac nodded.

"Very well," he answered. "But not before. It is foolish to run any unnecessary risks."

"Of course I shall send the message in cipher," said the count testily.

"Of course," agreed Caramac, "but ciphers are easily read. What is the matter with Ahmed, by the way?" he continued, looking at the wretched little man in the burnous. "He ought to be in bed."

The count glanced at the shivering figure. "A touch of fever," he answered indifferently.

He moved off, talking to the man in Arabic as he went, evidently giving him his instructions.

"Well, gentlemen," said Caramac, turning again to Granby and myself. "I will bid you farewell for the present. I am sorry to send you below on such a night. The sunset, however, is worth a glance on your way to the forward hold."

I felt a slight pressure in the back. Archimedes was urging us to advance. We walked — for my part a little unsteadily — along the deck, past the low graceful lines of the flying boat, which I saw was capacious enough to carry half a dozen people, towards the clean-cut bows of the yacht, now moving rapidly through the quiet sea. Truly, as Caramac had said, the sunset was worth a glance. A great disk of crimson was sinking swiftly into the ocean, the sky was red and yellow, fading into deep purple. Already Hesperus was shining, a pin point of gold in the golden air.

Caramac was sitting, saintlike and yet unholy, his white hair and his thin hands outlined against the glowing sky. So might Cæsar Borgia have looked in his old age, had he lived to reach it.

The forward hold, as I soon discovered, consisted of a small space, right in the bows of the ship, which contained nothing but a coil of rope. It was very narrow. One side was the hull of the ship itself; the other consisted of a wooden partition. Behind the partition was Granby, whom they had thrust into the corresponding cell on the other side. To both cells there were doors or bulkheads of steel. The partition must have been very solid and thick for, though I called to Granby, I got no answer and could hear nothing from him.

I seemed to pass an eternity seated on that coil of rope, my wrists numb with constriction and my body aching from the discomfort of my position. It was pitch dark and, as my hands were lashed behind me, I could not see my wrist watch. We were to die at dawn. Was there, yet, I wondered, any light in the sky?

After I had been in the hold — for how long I do not know, but some hours at least — I heard the sound of a footfall and abruptly the darkness became less intense. I was aware of a crack, scarcely of light but of something that made the darkness less compact. Was this the end?

"Is that the English colonel?" came a voice in French rapidly and in a low tone.

I was so surprised that I did not for the moment answer.

The question was repeated.

"No," I said in the same language, "it is Mr. Carroll."

"Ah," exclaimed the voice, "it is the husband."

"Who is it?" I said.

"S-st," came the voice. "Don't make a noise, Monsieur. We may be heard."

"Who are you?" I repeated in a whisper.

Light hands were touching me on the shoulders now.

"Turn round," said the voice in my ear.

I obeyed without a word. Something cold and sharp touched my wrists for a moment. I felt a slight pain as of burning and then my hands were free.

"It is all right, Monsieur," said the voice. "It is I, Marie."

"Marie?" I said stupidly. "Of course."

"Monsieur," said Marie, gripping my wrists so that I winced with pain, for they were very tender from their confinement in the twisted cords, "your wife — she loves you, does she not?"

"I hope so," I answered.

"And you, you love her?"

"I do," I replied after a moment.

Again came the little nervous laugh in the darkness.

"It is droll," she said, "how these English love their wives.

"Listen, Monsieur," she went on, "they have put her in a cabin on deck. She is alone. She has locked the door and she refuses to come out. But that is useless, for they will break down the door with axes when the moment comes to leave the yacht. They do not know I am aboard. I swam out to the yacht from Le Grau du Roi."

"You swam out?" I said incredulously.

"Yes," she answered. "I am a strong swimmer. You have seen me swim in the pool, have you not? And last night the yacht was lying closer to the shore.

"The count," she continued hurriedly, "left us all . . . his women . . . at a little farm of his in the Camargues, not far from Le Grau du Roi. We were to wait there till he came for us, but I knew he would never return. I know the count, Monsieur. I imagined I could keep him. But his heart has been touched again."

"His heart," I echoed.

Surprisingly I heard a sob in the darkness.

"I love him," she said in a low quick tone.

There seemed to be no possible answer to that, and for a moment neither of us spoke.

"I think I understand," I said at last.

"I think you do, Monsieur," she answered. "I know who you are, and something of what your friend, the English colonel, has done. I would not set you free if there was any other way. You don't think I would betray my — my lover," she ended simply.

"I am sure, Mademoiselle," I answered, "that you would be more faithful to him than he deserves."

I could not see her face, but I fancied that she was smiling.

"Too faithful," she answered. "That is foolish. But what would you? It is stronger than I am. I shall win him back for a while when — when your wife is no longer there."

I felt her hand in mine.

"You see, Monsieur," she went on, "it is quite simple. We must go and find her."

"I ask nothing better," I answered, "but how shall we do that?"

"I will lead you to the deck," she answered.

"There is as yet hardly any one about, only a man on watch in the bows and a man at the wheel. The others are drinking. Now listen. We will go to the cabin where your wife is shut up. She would not open the door to me, but she will open it at once to you. That is why you are necessary to my plan," she concluded naïvely.

"And then?" I said.

"The rest will be easy," she answered. "They have put out for her a leather coat so that she shall not be cold when they take to the flying boat to-morrow."

"How do you know all this?" I asked suspiciously.

"Did I not say that they were drinking? For an hour past I have been listening."

"There is also a cap with goggles," she added inconsequently.

"Well?" I said rather bewildered.

"Don't you see?" she answered. "I shall put on those clothes and take her place."

"You mean that you will let them take you in the flying boat instead of her?"

"Of course," she said impatiently. "What else should I mean?"

"But you will be running a risk," I rejoined.

I heard her sigh in the darkness. "I don't think so," she said at last. "And in any case, I must take the risk. I shall win him back perhaps on the island, and if not — why then I care not what happens to me."

Again there was a silence between us.

"I will do as you suggest," I said at last. "But what do we do when Diana is free? They mean, you know, to sink the ship at dawn?"

"How can I say?" she asked, and now her voice was cold.

"I am releasing you and Madame your wife will also be free. Is not that enough? There is also your friend, the English colonel. He will know what to do. You will at least have a chance after — after we have left. That is my return for enabling me to go with the others."

"Quick then," I said.

"First I will take you to your wife," she answered, "and then, while you are talking to her, I will go to your friend. It is easy to reach him. The doors to your prison are bolted on the outside, but there is no lock. Come."

I followed her as best I could in the grey darkness, but first, for greater silence, I took off my shoes. We climbed the dark wooden companionway, reached the deck, crept past the flying boat and arrived at the main block of cabins. From one of them came sounds of laughter and the voice of the count floated down to us.

Marie drew me to the left till we stood in the shadow of a forward cabin, not far from the bridge but below it.

"Don't make a noise," she whispered. "She is in there. Persuade her to come out and take her back to your prison. That will be best for the moment. I will now go and release the colonel."

I squeezed her hand to show that I had understood, and cautiously looked about me. One of the cabin portholes was open. I crept towards it and looked into the tiny room.

Diana was lying on a kind of bed covered with bright chintz. Her eyes were closed.

"Di," I said in a low voice.

She did not stir.

Here was a complication. I must somehow attract her attention, but I must on no account make a noise. There was a small cushion lying on a chair just underneath the porthole. I picked it up and threw it upon the bed.

She stirred.

"Di," I said again.

Her eyes opened. She looked in bewilderment about her.

"It's Geoffrey," I said urgently. "I want you to open the door — quietly — at once."

She rose uncertainly and moved towards the window.

"Listen, darling," I said hurriedly. "We haven't any time to lose. Unlock the door."

"Geoffrey," she said, and her smile was such that I realised at that moment the whole agony of the fate that Caramac had prepared for me.

Without another word she came to the door. There was a soft click. In another moment her hand was in mine and together we reached the bulwarks and stood in the deep shadow of a boat.

"Come with me," I whispered. "I am going to hide you in the forehold."

At the head of the companionway we encountered Granby and Marie. Marie put a finger on her lips.

"Lead Madame down," she whispered. "I go to take her place."

Without a word I took her hand and raised it to my lips. She sighed softly in the darkness and then, a light ghost, was gone.

Granby looked after her a moment.

"Finish, good lady," he said softly. "The bright day is done and we are for the dark."

Then abruptly he turned to me.

"Now, listen, old boy," he went on, "stow Diana safely in your part of the hold and then come back here. And for God's sake, don't make a sound."

I took Diana down to our late prison and saw her comfortably bestowed. Then I mounted once more to the deck. Granby was crouching beside the ladder.

"I have been looking about," he whispered in my ear as I emerged. "I want you to come with me, Geoffrey,

and keep *cave;* and I hope you will have better luck than when you were outside the dovecote."

"What are you going to do?" I asked.

"I am going to the wireless cabin," he answered. "You remember the little Arab with the shivers. He was to send a message at three o'clock and it's nearly three already."

In silence I stole after him across the deck. It was enough for me that he had a plan. Soon we were crawling now on all fours, beneath the lighted windows of the cabin in which the count and the rest of them were amusing themselves. But all was now quiet, and I judged that they were snatching a brief hour of sleep in preparation for the flight at dawn. I saw Granby rise to his feet and peer through the starboard porthole of the last cabin. He looked for ten seconds or so and then dropped flat beside me, motioning me to do the same.

There came a sound of footsteps on the deck. They moved unsteadily past us and, in vague silhouette, I saw the form of the count, a large cigar glowing between his lips. He stumbled to the door of the wireless cabin and, after two attempts, got it open. He did not go inside, however, but said a couple of sentences in a sharp guttural tongue which I took to be Arabic. There was an answering murmur from within. Then he moved away and, almost before he was out of my sight, Granby was at the door. He pulled me by the sleeve and I crawled towards him.

"Stay here," he said. "And keep a sharp lookout."

I knelt down beside the door, while Granby slipped like a shadow round the edge of it. I could see part of the interior, an ordinary wireless cabin with the ap-

paratus upon a table at the far end. The little Arab clerk was seated in front of it, wrapped in his white burnous. His back was towards us.

Like a snake Granby glided forward. In the middle of the cabin he paused and rose to his knees. I saw him gather himself together and spring, lightly and silently, upon the back of the operator. I heard a slight gasp, instantly suppressed, as Granby's hands closed round his windpipe. The man was dragged to the floor, a whirl of white burnous and brown limbs. Forgetting my instructions, I darted in and caught him firmly by the legs.

"Good man," said Granby. "Hold him down while I get busy."

I took the fellow's belt, which was loose round his waist, and strapped his ankles together. It was not very difficult, for Granby's grip upon his windpipe had rendered him nearly unconscious. The sharp crackle of the wireless came to my ears as I did so. Granby was at the instrument. I do not know the Morse code, so I could not tell what message he was sending, but I saw a light of satisfaction in his eyes as he glanced at a chart spread upon the table before him. Then abruptly the noise ceased.

"Daren't risk sending any more," he whispered. "They may smell a rat. Quick; get the burnous off him."

I did as I was told while Granby picked up one of the long cushions covering the locker on one side of the cabin and propped it on a chair in front of the instrument. He wrapped the white burnous round it.

"Not very good," he said, "but it has got to do."

The Arab operator was now beginning to stir, but

Granby dealt with him firmly. In less than a minute we had him securely gagged and were carrying him between us out of the cabin. On deck we moved as silently as we could towards the shadow of the boat, beneath which Marie and I had crouched a few minutes before. Fortunately for us the night was now dark, for great clouds had overspread the moon and the yacht was pitching a little, not much, but enough to drown any small noise we made. I helped Granby lift the body of the wireless operator and drop it into the boat. Then we made off to the top of the companionway, descended it and reached our prison in safety. As I passed the steel sliding door, I noted to my intense surprise that barely twenty minutes had elapsed since Marie had first cut me free.

Granby slipped away again, while I found Diana on the coil of rope, which was all the forehold contained. He returned in a few minutes carrying three life belts.

"These may come in useful," he observed.

Then he turned his attention to the door. We were, of course, to remain together. The door of the compartment in which Granby had lately been confined was shut and bolted. The door to our own compartment he all but closed and then jammed his knife into the lower groove. Under his direction we both tested the door together. It stuck fast. There was only the thinnest crack between it and the side of the ship.

"Good," he said. "Now we have only to wait."

"What is going to happen?" I asked.

"Very simple," he answered. "I have sent out an S.O.S. and my message was picked up at Toulon. I

gave the ship's position and course as best I could from the chart on the operator's desk and told the receiving office to get in touch with the police prefect at Arles."

"Is that all?" I said doubtfully.

"Quite enough," he answered. "Bosanquet will have them all on the alert by now. There will be half a dozen destroyers looking for us within the next half-hour."

I looked at the glimmering figures on the dial of my wrist watch.

"Half-past three," I said.

"Yes," answered Granby, "but it still lacks an hour of dawn — four-thirty, Caramac said — and with any luck the destroyers will be here by that time. Anyway, it is our only chance."

I had a swift vision of a heeling ship and rushing water. We should drown like rats.

"But why do we wait here?" I asked. "We should at least stand a better chance on deck."

"Think," Granby urged. "Dawn is breaking; the destroyers, perhaps, are coming up; Count and Company will at once take to the flying boat, but you may be sure of one thing — Caramac won't leave us here alive. As soon as the destroyers are sighted, enter Negroes suitably equipped. We should be discovered at once on deck. Here we have a chance of holding them off. They can't shoot through this door. It is sheet steel. Caramac will have to scuttle the ship and run. And when he leaves, we leave."

"One moment," I said, "you've forgotten the bolt."

I felt his hand gripping my wrist.

"Good for you, Geoffrey," he said.

I could hear him wrenching at his knife and then I

heard the door sliding back. For ten minutes or more he was working in the grey dark.

"It's all right, Geoffrey," he said at last. "It's lucky I had a screw driver and scissors in the knife I bought at Arles. The bolt was secured by a nut and screw."

We slid the door back again and wedged it firm, leaving a slit for observation.

We waited for the most part in silence, as slowly darkness gave place to a faint greyness and then to something approaching light. The sea was rising steadily and the yacht began to pitch, but not unpleasantly. I sat beside Diana, my arm round her. She told me the details of her capture — nothing very original or striking, and I told her of our interview with Caramac and the part which Marie had played in our rescue.

From time to time we glanced at our watches.

It was past four o'clock before our enemies gave any sign. Then abruptly we heard the pattering of feet, followed by the tread of a heavy man in thick boots. Granby put his eye to the slit in the door.

"Archimedes, a couple of the crew and Richards," he announced.

We heard them straining at the door which covered the compartment in which Granby had been confined. We heard them enter and then came a sudden outburst of chatter, showing that they had discovered it to be empty. Almost immediately there came a blow upon our door and the sound of heavy breathing.

"Can't you get the damn thing open?"

It was Richards speaking.

"It is stuck fast, sar," came the voice of Archimedes.

"What do you mean, stuck? Prise it open."

"Very good, sar," responded the big Negro.

The breathing was louder now. The door creaked and trembled.

"We may have to fight for it," said Granby in a low voice. "It is our only chance if they break in. Go for them low, Geoffrey, and try to get hold of their pistols."

My heart was beating like a hammer, but I prepared to do my best. Then came the sound of more footsteps outside, and abruptly I heard the voice of the count.

"Richards," it called. "Leave all that. The lookout man has sighted some destroyers in the offing, and there's no time to lose. They are coming up. We have got to leave and damn quick."

There was an excited jabber outside, and I heard the voice of the count.

"Can't you bolt the door?" it was asking.

"There is no bolt, sar."

"Well, come along, for God's sake," the voice went on. "They'll drown anyway. The doctor is blowing the whole show to smithereens in quarter of an hour."

He added something which I could not catch. Then again I heard the voice of the count.

"It's all right," he was saying, "the girl's on the 'plane. She gave no kind of trouble."

There came a scattering of footsteps and complete silence for perhaps three minutes.

"Shall we get the door open?" I asked.

Granby laid a hand on my arm.

"Give them just a minute," he answered. "We must make sure that the coast is really clear. Meanwhile we may as well put on these," and he pointed as he spoke, to the life belts on the floor.

I fastened one of them on Diana, one upon Granby as he knelt watching by the door, and got into the third myself.

There was a trampling overhead and the whine and shriek of a derrick.

"They are lowering the seaplane into the water," said Granby.

He chuckled suddenly.

"They won't get very far," he continued. "I had a look at its engine when I was getting the life belts, and I mixed the leads of the sparking plugs. The timing will be a trifle peculiar and I shall be very much surprised if they succeed in rising from the water."

He waited, perhaps, another two or three minutes. The silence deepened.

"Now," said Granby at last.

I had already put my hand to the door when, suddenly, there was a further sound of footsteps outside. Granby put his eye to the slit.

"By George," he whispered, "look at this."

I bent and peeped as directed, and fear, immediate and unreasonable, clutched at my heart. What could this mean? Two Negroes were coming down the companion ladder and in their arms they bore the wasted form of Caramac. Behind them was a third Negro carrying the wheel chair.

"Thank you," said the doctor, as they arrived safely at the bottom of the ladder. "This is the last service I shall require of you."

The third Negro placed the chair within about fifteen feet of the door. Then the other two carefully put their burden within it. When they drew back Caramac was

facing us, and I saw that in his hand, the end of it resting on his knees, was an automatic.

"Leave me," he said in French to the Negroes. "Remember that you have only ten minutes to get away."

One by one the Negroes swarmed up the ladder and disappeared. A moment passed and the silence was now unbroken.

Then Caramac spoke again, this time in English.

"Colonel Granby," he said.

"Present," answered Granby.

"And Mr. Carroll, I suppose, is with you.

"You are surprised to see me here, perhaps," he went on, "and yet it is a very natural and a very elegant arrangement. In death they were not divided. The Count de Vallantré, Richards and the general are now busy saving their lives. For me, as you know, life has ceased to be of any great interest or value. I am a dying man, and whether I die now or a few weeks hence is a matter of indifference. The readiness is all, and I am ready. I am told that you have had the foresight to remove the bolt from your prison door. You were hoping at the last moment to escape death by drowning. You may do so even yet if you prefer a bullet to the salt water of the sea."

Granby gripped the steel partition which separated us from the enemy.

"Be careful, Colonel," went on the quiet voice, "if the door moves I shall shoot."

I was still looking through the slit. Caramac was sitting motionless in his wheel chair, the automatic on his knees, his face white and calm, but with an implacable determination in his eyes.

The minutes passed very slowly. I made room for Diana by the door. She could not stay blindly in the darkness. We all three waited and watched, Diana leaning heavily upon me. Caramac did not move, and the silence of death brooded over the ship. Then from somewhere far off, in the stern, came a dull explosion which shook the yacht so that I was thrown sideways.

"Five minutes," came the voice of Caramac.

The floor on which we were crouching began to tilt. Granby was kneeling by the door. I saw his face, tense in the obscure light. He bent down, pulled away the knife which had jammed the door, and pushed ever so slightly so that it moved imperceptibly to the left. This gave us more light and a better view of what was happening.

"We must make a dash for it at the last," whispered Granby. "I shall go straight for Caramac, and if he gets me, Geoffrey, you should be on to him before he can fire a second time. Be ready, when I open the door to make a rush for it."

The slant of the floor was increasing. I looked again through the slit, and, as I did so, I noticed that a change had come over the face of Caramac. Something had shaken his quiet confidence of a moment ago.

Then I understood what it was.

The invalid chair stood, as I have said, about fifteen feet from the door. The Negroes had, in fact, placed it well in the middle of the open space at the foot of the companion ladder. They had forgotten that the ship in sinking would heel over, and the chair was unsecured.

Caramac had already realised his position. With one

hand he was grasping the right wheel by which he was accustomed to propel the chair. Only thus could he prevent it from running backwards and dashing itself against the bulwarks behind him.

"Get ready," whispered Granby.

The exhortation was unnecessary, for even as he spoke, the chair, yielding to the tilt of the deck, which was now very pronounced, began to slide, despite the fact that Caramac was gripping the wheel. Down it went, crashing against the side of the yacht, while, simultaneously, Granby and I thrust open the door. I caught a glimpse of Caramac's white face as Granby dashed at him. He was huddled against the bulwark, lying almost on his back. Deliberately he raised the pistol and fired. The movement of the chair, however, had upset his aim, and the bullet went through the deck above our heads. He had no chance to fire again. Granby threw himself forward. I heard a light gasp and Caramac's face, over Granby's shoulder, turned from white to alabaster. The little colour in the cheeks abruptly left it, the eyelids fluttered, and the automatic crashed to the floor.

Then Granby turned and shouted:

"Quick. Up the ladder, both of you."

Diana was beside me. I helped her to scramble up the ladder now slanting at any angle of thirty degrees, and as I made to follow her, I looked over my shoulder. Caramac was still huddled against the bulwark in his chair, but even as I looked he slipped forward and fell with his arms outstretched upon the deck.

There came another shout from Granby below, urging me on. I sped up the ladder, and he himself was

beside me almost before I had cleared the top of it.

We were only just in time, for, as we reached the deck, it seemed to slip beneath us and over the high rail above our heads came a straight clean line of water.

The line broke and crashed. I felt myself being drawn irresistibly down, my ears singing. I remember holding my breath, with lungs strained to bursting, for an infinity of time, and then I found myself floating on the surface of the water. The yacht was no longer there. Granby and Diana were beside me and almost within hail a long lean destroyer was racing towards us.

Nothing more remains to tell. The flying boat in which the count, Richards and General Tanyi had tried to escape had, as Granby had foreseen, been unable to rise from the water. All three were captured and, as I write, their trial is expected. The public, however, have never learned much of the League of Discontent, nor are they likely to do so. Half the Foreign Offices of Europe are interested in keeping some of the more important facts as strictly as possible to themselves; Granby reading these pages as a responsible officer has obliged me to suppress several passages which I considered to be almost essential to the tale. Let it suffice that, for the moment, the League was broken and destroyed.

I can say no more. This whole problem of the minorities in Europe is a delicate question, and, as Granby says, a delicate question may be defined in the political world as a question which, unless it be handled by an expert — which I have no claim or wish to be — is bound to become indelicate.

Let me, therefore, end as I began. Diana is driving

the Rolls as when we came down from Avignon, and she picked up the nail and heard Granby singing over the brow of the hill. We have resumed our holiday and we are running silently over the lovely road which leads from Arles to St. Rhémy. It is evening. I am beside Diana. Granby and Carstairs are behind. The dying sun is shining aslant upon the grey olives, and the red earth. Granby is leaning over my shoulder.

"Geoffrey," he says softly, "the sunset, I think, is worth a glance."

For a moment I heard again the mocking voice of Caramac, and saw myself walking to the dark forehold, looking my last on the red rim of the sun as it sank into the sea. Then almost at once came another picture — a frail figure huddled against the bulwark and a line of water, drawn tight like a bowstring, crashing down upon the deck of a heeling ship.

"I am told," said Carstairs suddenly, as we sped along, "that we shall eat a very tolerable *pâté de lièvre* to-night at St. Rhémy."

THE END